

Imagining Food in Banff Research Report 2018-2019



Produced for Bow Valley Food Alliance
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RESEARCH REPORT: INTRODUCTION-KEY FOOD STRENGTHS IN BANFF

This research project was designed in partnership with the Bow Valley Food Alliance to identify key food issues in the Town of Banff. It is the companion to the *Research Report Summary*, which explains why and how this research was conducted. The research outlined below describes eleven key food strengths as explained by Bow Valley community members. While the below quotations and strengths have been divided into separate themes, they are all interrelated.

1. Community Lunches and Dinners

The most talked about food-related supports were the community lunches and dinners in Banff and Canmore. People spoke about how these not only provide meals for people in need but also create community and spaces to gather. Interviewees discussed several different community meals including community lunches and dinners at the Banff Senior Center, chili nights at Banff Park Church, pancake breakfasts, Food and Friends in Canmore, and meals put on by cultural communities such as the Filipino-Canadian Organization of the Rocky Mountains (FORM). Multiple interviewees expressed a desire and need to expand these community meals, both in relation to hosting them on a bigger scale as well as providing increased support to host them in the future. Several interviewees underlined the particular importance of cultural meals, explaining that these provide a welcoming space for diverse groups to meet.

“The Monday night dinners in Canmore and Thursday night dinners in Banff offer a sense of belonging. I think the community dinners are a really wonderful way to celebrate. Food is a connection point.” Laurelle

“I think that the lunches and dinners are really giving people permission to celebrate food. People want more opportunities to do that – to celebrate food. The dinners have also helped make connections between different food programs. For example, the food rescue and community dinners work together. Additionally, the dinners encourage corporate social responsibility engagement. Many of the big hospitality groups want to be a part of them.” Jill

“The community dinners are a very good way for developing a sense of community and also allow various community groups to showcase themselves.” Andrew

“The community lunch in Banff is social but it’s also about getting a meal.” Nickie

“I think the community lunches and dinners have done a good job of creating a welcoming space...I think it’s great that there’s both a lunch and dinner happening because they cater to different populations.” Zarifa

“I started going to community lunches five months ago. I was just going there as a guest and one day I was talking to Jill – she’s very outgoing – and when I told her about my background in culinary art, things went from there. The first meal I helped with was the Azerbaijani cultural lunch. When we finished they asked me if I wanted to do something from my country, Morocco. So we did that and that was the second multicultural lunch. Since then, I’ve done another Moroccan meal in Canmore as well as other multicultural lunches in Banff. When you’re preparing food for the lunches and dinners, you always have to make sure you’re making something that everyone can eat – Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, all backgrounds. You have to balance everything so everyone can come and enjoy something. At the multicultural lunches, I’ve met people from countries I’ve never thought I’d meet. The lunches give people a chance to celebrate their culture and introduce their culture and share their celebrations. They allow the rest of the community to celebrate with them. Aside from the food at the lunches, people also come to communicate and socialize. Most of the connections I’ve made here in Banff have been through the community lunches. It’s not only about food.” Said

“The community lunches and dinners are great – there’s the one at the seniors center and some of the churches do them as well. The cultural lunches are fantastic. It’s really nice to be exposed not only to cultural food but to people and how proud they are of their food. I had no idea there were Tibetan refugees in Banff but I learned about the community by attending the dinner. Initially, the community dinners had to overcome a big hurdle because people thought it was a soup kitchen for the underprivileged. The cultural lunches really help take it to that different level and make it about community. Plus all the food is really good, healthy, and filling.” Dawn

“Food is something to be celebrated and we can see people doing that in Banff with pancake breakfasts and different cultural potlucks. Food brings community together but whether or not we’re doing that enough on a bigger scale, probably not. However, I think we recognize that having a meal together helps with social interaction and feeling part of the community. There’s something about sharing a meal with someone that ignites a connection.” Corrie

“We started a Friday meal called Chilli Friday about three months ago and it’s been going well. I think the least we can do for the young people that flock to our town is give them a free meal. At the church we don’t ask for donations, we just give it for free. We’ve also opened up the upstairs of our church which has ping pong, a pool table, foosball and all sorts of board games. We do the free meal on Friday so people have somewhere to come to that’s not a club or a bar. It’s an alternative.” Nigel

“In 2016 on June 12th – the Philippine’s Independence Day – we organized a big meal called Boodle in the Central Park in Banff. It was based on a military practice in the Philippines that includes a long table in the middle and people eat with their bare hands. The purpose is to strengthen brotherhood and friendship and we brought it here. Everyone was invited and we had lots of diversity. We also had lots of people volunteering which was amazing. We’re trying to do another bigger one this next year in celebration of Filipino Independence Day in Banff. We have also hosted a Filipino community potluck at the senior’s center that had 13 main dishes and 19 pastries. Someone donated a pig and we’d like to do that again as well.” Jun

“Not having to eat alone is a big deal – the community dinners are important.” Carol

“The different nights when you can get a dinner are really helpful. When I was in college I worked in the restaurants so I knew I could eat once a day. When there’s a dinner, a meal, a community dinner, I think those are the things that go a long way especially with the transient community as well as for people who are looking to make new friends. We all gather around food.” Kevin

2. The Bow Valley Food Alliance

Interviewees often talked about the work of the Bow Valley Food Alliance (BVFA) and its significance for the Bow Valley as a whole. Multiple people highlighted the ways that the BVFA brings together different individuals and organizations who do food work across the valley, from food producers to community-based food organizations. Interviewees explained that the BVFA has helped to forward conversations about food as well as educate valley communities about food issues. Furthermore, interviewees talked about the role the alliance has played in building partnerships, giving community members a space to express their food-related concerns and ideas, and supporting the work of community-based food programming.

“I’m inspired by the Food Alliance and their work.” Jun

“Banff is really lucky to have Jill Harrison. She’s spectacular, passionate, driven and intelligent. She’s done a great job creating the Food Alliance. It’s really important to have spaces like the Alliance because they help create partnerships. I would love to see the creation of more partnerships and extending these partnerships out to Morley as well.” Laurelle

“The fact that Jill spends a lot of time focused on food is amazing, particularly because with the Bow Valley Food Alliance she’s able to focus more widely on the region and not just the Town of Banff. It is great to have someone who’s been given the space to do that kind of work. From a food perspective, the Alliance has been doing some really good work. For example, it has created more understanding around food insecurity in the Bow Valley. Having a network like the Alliance also supports initiatives like the Banff Food Rescue as well as contributing to a more general momentum around food.” Shannon

“I think it’s great that the Bow Valley Food Alliance is addressing food issues and trying to find solutions. It’s a huge community development because food is such a big part of quality of life.” Corrie

“I’m a big fan of the Bow Valley Food Alliance. I think what they’re starting is really important.” Christian

“What I’d like to see is the success of the Bow Valley Food Alliance. I support their work and wish I had more time to be involved with it.” Kevin

“One of my biggest joys with the Alliance has been having food producers come to the table. I’m a connector and I love connecting people through the Alliance – seeing all the different food people from across the valley and getting them all into one room has been great. Having the Alliance do its work across the valley has really been important.” Jill

“The Food Alliance has been a place to start conversations about food. Jill has really been a connector – she’s how I got involved in the Food Alliance. The people who come to Alliance meetings are committed and interested in sharing. The Alliance is open to everyone and is very flexible.” Sue

“For people who are interested in contributing to food-related decisions in the valley, the BVFA is an avenue that could make a difference. I think you have to be a squeaky wheel to be heard and you need more than one person to change the way things are run. One person can’t carry the whole weight of trying to change things.” Nickie

“Jill is a superstar and has really been getting people engaged through the Alliance. The Alliance has really been a positive way for the community to come together to give a voice to the food system. While Banff does a needs assessment every five years, where else are people going to be heard? Now we have the Alliance which provides a place for that!” Zarifa

3. Banff Food Rescue

After the community meals, the Banff Food Rescue was one of the most mentioned food programs in Banff. Interviewees explained that it met people’s needs because of its flexible hours and because there was no limit on the number of visits. Interviewees also highlighted the positive environmental impacts of Banff Food Rescue and the dedication of the volunteers who run the program. Numerous interviewees mentioned the importance of providing further support for the work of Banff Food Rescue.

“It’s really good that there’s a food rescue. It helps a lot.” Jun

“Food waste recovery programs can make a huge difference especially when it comes to issues of affordability. It can make a difference for someone having milk or fresh vegetables that they might not otherwise purchase because they feel it’s too expensive. It can also make a difference for non-profits by enabling them to have more diverse foods available. Banff food rescue does excellent work. They’ve gathered so many volunteers and there’s so much volunteer spirit. They are really well set up to expand but need some further support. One of the specific items we put in the food waste report is for the town to explore how the town as an organization can provide further support to Banff Food Rescue to divert more food.” Shannon

“Food rescue is an example of how people can start something and get the community to rally around it. The way it’s run also makes a lot of sense for Banff because Banff is fast paced, it’s 24-7, its people coming and going for both long and short amounts of time. I think the food rescue has really figured out the secret of making food available to people – they have their doors open at night and you can come back as much as you want.” Corrie

“After their Thursday night, Banff Food Rescue sometimes sends us food to use at the chili dinners. It’s good because the Food Rescue has vegetables and that kind of stuff.” Nigel

“From a Town of Banff’s perspective, we want to reduce food waste, be it household or commercial. Our Resource and Recovery team are currently working on a community education

strategy which I don't think would have happened this soon if it wasn't for Banff Food Rescue's work. When you hear the numbers: that 200lbs of food are being rescued from the waste stream every day and 50 people are lining up in front of somebody's house to pick it up and then 200 people attend a community dinner potluck which has been created as a result of that, that's a great community success story." Jill

"Alanna does such a great job with the Banff Food Rescue." Avni

"The Banff Food Rescue initiative is very positive although I think it's starting to outpace itself." Andrew

4. Community Gardens and Growing Spaces

Although people often spoke about the need for more growing spaces, they also highlighted the spaces that are currently available for people to garden in Banff, including two Banff Community Greenhouses, a backyard garden share program, and the Banff Springs' Greenhouse. They explained that community gardens and other growing spaces in town help people to learn about their food systems, contribute to people's ability to access food, create community and a sense of place, and promote environmental sustainability.

"What is challenging and also exciting about the Banff Greenhouse is that it gets people to think: 'I can do that!' When people make that leap, it's great because even if someone is growing their first lettuce and it's a small amount, they make the connection that it's possible to grow your own food." Heather

"On a small scale, greenhouses provide a way of helping people eat more economically." Corrie

"Community gardens in the Bow Valley help promote biodiversity and ecological sustainability. They also help create a sense of belonging." Laurelle

"The town of Banff is very supportive of the greenhouse association. We're really pushing for a third greenhouse and for the first time I heard conversations about commercial food production. It will be interesting to see whether growing food on a commercial level will be possible." Jill

"The greenhouse plays many roles. Education, advocacy, growing food to eat. Quite a lot can be achieved through greenhouses that people aren't aware of. Last year we were growing bell peppers and tomatoes and you name it. When people see you can grow those kinds of things, they realize it's possible to do so. It also helps people develop a connection to our food system, helps them understand where our food comes from, how it's grown, and helps people realize how tough it can be to grow things – how much space it takes up. People also come to the greenhouse to escape and destress. Recreation and food security both play a role in the garden. We estimate upwards of 50 pounds of produce can be grown from just one plot. If every single plot followed the same philosophy, we'd be looking at over a ton of food being produced for the Bow Valley just with these two greenhouses." Andrew

"Community gardens are really important but not everyone can get in." Anonymous 1

“People who have access to community gardens are just delighted. Although they’re quite small and have some limitations that way, they allow people to have fresh produce. Community gardens also help promote sustainability. Recently, there has been a program that encourages people to share their backyards with someone else who wants to garden.” Sue
“Banff has two community gardens but it sounds like there’s a lot more need than there is space. Banff hospital is also trying to get a tower going to grow food.” Zarifa

“They’re doing some amazing things through Alpine Edibles and through the community gardens and gardening spaces.” Dawn

“We have a greenhouse at the Banff Springs that is part of our apprenticeship program, Rocky Mountain Apprentices. Each year we task our apprentices with growing as many different fruits, veggies, and herbs as they can in a small footprint greenhouse. This is helpful because they get to understand the root of where these products are coming from and that they’re not just coming from a package. The greenhouse also provides the opportunity for our apprentices to understand how the nutrients in the soil, air, and water contribute to making great products. In the end, the apprentices become more appreciative of the ingredients they’re using in the kitchen. It helps them reduce food waste and understand the importance of using products from nose to tail or root to tippy top. Apprentices also gain an appreciation of the amount of work that farmers invest in order to grow the great products we use in our kitchen. Overall, the greenhouse is mostly educational, but we also use the produce in one of our restaurants. However, what we grow is not abundant enough to supply the entire resort but it does give us an opportunity to utilize some great fresh ingredients grown on the property.” Robert

5. Banff Farmers Market

Interviewees underlined the Banff Farmers Market as one of the best places for community members to buy fresh, healthy and sustainable produce. They spoke about the important ways that the market builds community, supports the development of local food businesses, and showcases diverse cultural foods.

“The Banff farmers market has a different community vibe than being in the produce aisle in the grocery store. It adds to that social community piece which is really important.” Corrie

“The Banff farmers market helps create a sense of belonging.” Laurelle

“The Banff Farmers Market is a public space that promotes community, although it only happens for part of the year.” Dawn

“The farmers market has been a game changer. It’s been supported by the municipality and the community. If you go to the farmers market in Banff on Wednesday, it’s 90% locals. It’s worse than going to the grocery store to get milk! You’re there for an hour because you know everyone. The farmers market is also a fantastic example of a space that has lots of different cultural foods. You name a culture and they’ve got a food truck there. There are curries from everywhere in the

world, flakey pies from Australia, and so on. It's amazing that people are going to the market to experience food produced by local people." Jill

"We have the Banff market in the summer which helps people access fresh fruits and vegetables." Andrew

"The Banff farmers market is great although it's expensive. It offers choice and local options even if the produce is not from the Bow Valley." Anonymous 1

"At the farmers market people clamour! We clamour because we're thinking: 'Oh my goodness there's actually fresh local produce here!' People are excited." Sue

"The Banff farmers market does a good job of bringing in food that is more equitable and sustainably produced." Zarifa

"I love events such as the Banff Farmers Markets and the Banff Christmas Market. I think it's really cool to be able to interpret food and bring Bow Valley energy to those really well organized events." Anonymous 2

"I'm really impressed with what they're doing in B.C. at their farmers markets with things like craft beer, kombucha, local fruits and vegetables and so on. The more we can support that sort of thing here, the better. It's happening a bit at the Banff farmers market with locals being able to sell their wares. People are trying different things, whether it's sprouts in their basement or something else." Heather

"I went to the farmers market in Invermere about nine years ago and had a great time. On the drive home I asked myself: why isn't there a market in Banff? With overwhelming support from the community and council, the market began despite opposition from several business owners in town. We started with about 25 vendors eight years ago and it's slowly been building and now there's a waiting list. I have about 90 spaces to rent and we're full in the main summer months with about 60 percent artisans and 40 percent produce and ready to eat foods. Sometimes when potential vendors find out what they need to do in terms of health and safety regulations in order to make and sell food at the market, it can be really overwhelming. They back off because they think it's too much. So I try to help them through the health issues that come up. For example, as the market manager one of the things I do is help vendors build their own wash stations. I think that kind of one-on-one help can be really important. Sometimes vendors have a hard time getting into Calgary to buy the ingredients they need to make whatever they're making, so I've brought a group of vendors together and done shopping trips. I think markets are a great incubator for small business. You might start here and then find a little hole in the wall and start your own restaurant there. At the market you can come and test your product. My goal with the market was for it to be for the locals. By locals for the locals. The market is operated as a not-for-profit and we give preference to locals first and then it moves out to Calgary and then most of the produce comes from B.C." Rene

6. Town of Banff

The contribution of the Town of Banff to food systems work is clear in many of these sections – including through support of the Banff Greenhouses, support of Banff Food Rescue, the creation of the Banff Farmer’s Market, and the mandate for Jill Harrison to spend part of her time as a Town employee working on the Bow Valley Food Alliance. In this section, interviewees highlight these contributions with a focus on the value of paid work and the importance of having salaried positions that strengthen food systems in Banff and the Bow Valley more generally. Multiple interviewees praised the attention that the Banff Council has given to food issues with the hope that this focus will continue to develop and increase.

“It is wonderful that the town hired Jill with the mandate to look at food related concerns and pursue food related projects – that says a lot. Jill has been the hub of so much of what is happening relating to food in the Bow Valley.” Sue

“The Town appointed and pay Jill to do this work around food. That’s huge. I don’t see Canmore paying anyone to do anything like that. Instead, they’re expecting the community to do that kind of stuff. But the Town of Banff is allocating money for that work. When you allocate money to something, you’re committing yourself. I think that’s the biggest thing they’ve done as a municipality. Luckily Jill’s work has included the whole Bow Valley. They haven’t made it Banff-centric which is really important because we’re all close enough to be considered a local food system.” Avni

“The Town has been really supportive of our work and we’ve had many positive interactions with Jill. It’s been reasonably easy to get a permit in order to host our community meals although we had to do some learning along the way.” Nigel

“Jill Harrison does important work. Paying people to do community-based food work is necessary in order to make food programs sustainable and consistent.” Sachiko

“The town has been really easy to work with. When I first started the market, Town Council listened when I got a petition with a bunch of signatures from locals who wanted a market. Council did what their constituents asked and they made the market happen as a result. More recently, they’ve asked me for recommendations and one of the recommendations I made was that we should only invite vendors from Alberta or B.C to the farmers market. I really believe in eating locally so I didn’t want to see any produce coming from America or Mexico. They introduced a rule that only allowed Alberta and B.C. produce to be sold at the market which I was fully on board with.” Rene

“Council cares a lot about food security. When I was brought on, I was brought on to see what was missing and to develop something food security related. I began with organizing an informal group that got together twice a year with the hopes of coordinating some of the efforts around food in the Valley.” Jill

“Through the town, we had an opportunity to help fund the third community greenhouse and when that came up it was approved. However, it was approved for something like 2021 and so I

put a motion forward to get it on the books for 2018. To get the funding sooner. And that happened.” Corrie

“The town has provided support for cooking classes which help get people excited about food and how they can make it. Additionally, a lot of the grants that the BCCF has given out have gone to food related groups and projects in the last year.” Dawn

“The fact that Jill as a Town of Banff employee spends a lot of time focused on food is wonderful. It’s not always in a community the size of Banff that there’s someone who’s been given the space to do that and I think there’s a lot of value in that. I appreciate that both as a staff person at the town and as a person living in the region” Shannon

7. The Hospitality Industry

Interviewees spoke about how the hospitality industry provides various cultural foods through a variety of different ethnic restaurants. They also talked about how the industry supports local food production by sourcing from Alberta farms as well as educating staff and guests about the types of food on restaurant plates. Several interviewees mentioned how some industry restaurants are reducing food waste by ordering less-than-perfect vegetables, using all parts of their food products to reduce waste, and donating food that would otherwise be thrown away. Interviewees underlined volunteer contributions as well as food donations from the hospitality industry to community food programs and initiatives. While there was discussion at length about the issues involved in staff housing in the service industry, a few interviewees also underlined the positive work that some industry businesses are doing to ensure staff are fed healthy meals at staff cafeterias.

“Quatro, the Filipino restaurant in Canmore is great – they provide Filipino food for people in the Bow Valley. For example, they cook Filipino meals like Tapsalog which is a combination of three things – beef, egg, and fried rice – for breakfast.” Jun

“Tourists and locals alike have a lot of choice in terms of restaurant food here. There isn’t much you can’t get. There are Indian, Italian, French, Mexican, vegetarian and many other kinds of restaurants. For a town of 8,000 people, you’ve got a whole lot of choice in front of you. Are people able to influence that choice? I’d say so. We’re always listening to our guests, and we really pride ourselves on attempting to stay current with trends and delivering what people want. In the slower season we really try to celebrate locals – for example, by creating special menus. We’re able to have so many divergent restaurant concepts in town because we have the tourist base to support it. I also really love the commitment to locality in the Bow Valley and making our regional specialities available to an international market. Anonymous 2

“I think some restaurants, like the Bison, are making an effort to buy their products more locally which is nice to see.” Rene

“Lots of restaurants and small businesses are very supportive of growing produce here in the Bow Valley. I sell to about eight restaurants in Canmore and one in Banff. Normally I can sell out to my regular restaurants. I think there’s a larger demand for local produce in the Bow Valley.” Christian

“We’re starting over a million-dollar renovation of our new staff restaurant. Staff will be able to walk into it just like they’d walk into any free-standing restaurant and have amazing local healthy food, including vegan items, available 24 hours a day. We’re also pushing partnerships with local farmers. We’re asking them: ‘What are the ugly produce you have?’ We’re trying to use those in our staff cafeteria and show how ugly food can be amazingly tasty food. With our apprentices, we’re asking: ‘How do we use ugly vegetables? Do we use them in different casseroles, soups, stocks, sauces or whatever it may be? Or are we burning them and creating vegetable ash?’ We work closely with our local vendors and build relationships. This is helpful because when we get to know and understand our local vendors, we take that information and teach it to our apprentices, the future culinarians, as well as our guests. Plus, our service staff has a fun story to tell when they’re at the table about where the food comes from. We’ve been talking with the Banff Lake Louise Tourist Food Task Force and asking: ‘How can we work together to leverage our purchasing power in order to support local farmers?’ We want to keep as much of our local produce in this area instead of shipping it off to Saskatchewan or British Columbia. We tell farmers: ‘Let us have the cream of the crop. We’ll support you in ensuring that your product is taken care of and purchased throughout the year. Supporting as many local producers as possible is really important because when you support local farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and so on, you give back to the community. Without them communities like Banff and Canmore and the surrounding areas and Alberta in general wouldn’t survive. I’ve found that local producers have the tendency to have the best products. Another thing we do is use products from start to finish. For instance, we’ll take a carrot and make a carrot tartare, use the skins for a powder, use the greens for a garnish or a salad and so on. In these kinds of ways we use each item as fully as we can.” Robert

“There are some wonderful employee cafeterias and subsidized food programs in the Bow Valley. Although there is still a lot of work to do, I think it’s a whole lot better now than what it was because a lot more employers are taking better stock of what their accommodations look like. There are some groups out there raising the bar which is good for everybody.” Kevin

“Folks in the hospitality sector are very interested in addressing the issue of waste – both in terms of reducing food waste and donating food waste. I was really impressed at the number of people who were interested.” Shannon

“The service industry has donated lots of food to BanffLife, Christmas dinners, and Thanksgiving dinners. I remember when the Mount Royal caught on fire, all sorts of restaurants brought food over to the fire hall.” Corrie

“The food industry in Banff has been supportive of various food programs in different ways. For example, they have donated a lot of the food to the community lunches.” Anonymous 1

“The hospitality industry has provided a lot of the volunteers for our community meals. I think they’ve been waiting for an opportunity to do something for the community and we’ve given them that permission. Banff Lake Louise Tourism also has a food strategy where they educate their staff about where the food they’re serving comes from. They’ve brought in chefs who are passionate about the farm to table culture. The tourist industry is also connecting with local food

producers and producing some of their own food with greenhouses on top of hotels. All this helps the community become more aware of the reality that we have local food sources here.” Jill

“We have local restaurants and businesses that promote belonging like Wild Flour. The Banff Springs bakery also does a great job.” Dawn

8. Developing Relationships and Partnerships

Connections and collaborations have come up in several of the other sections, highlighting the ongoing work to build partnerships across different organizations, businesses, and food sectors more broadly. Below, interviewees continue to point out the important collaborations they are involved in, including restaurant collaborations with local food suppliers, collaborations between the non-profit sector and the Town of Banff, collaborations between different cultural groups, and burgeoning collaborations between Banff groups and ȩyāñhé Nakoda communities in Morley.

“When we organize Filipino potlucks for the wider community we often find a business that will donate some of the meat we use. For one community potluck we had to go to a business in High River to get 30 kilos of beef and 30 kilos of chicken, which they gave to us for free. We’ve also had businesses sell food to us at a lower cost which is helpful...In our community we also have non cash-based exchanges of food. Different people within our community order from others based on mutual agreements. There is also exchanges of food between the Filipino community and other communities such as the Japanese. There are key people in our community who you can text and ask: give me an adobo and they’ll provide you with it. In our culture, we always take care of our guests. It’s an insult for us if our guest spend money on food when they’re in our house. It’s taboo. Overall, connections and collaborations are very important to work to address food issues. I’ve been encouraging those in my community to join food concerned groups like the Bow Valley Food Alliance.” Jun

“We have collaborations with many different suppliers including those in the Bow Valley. It’s been wonderful. We can assist them with our recipes and they can produce en masse for us so it saves us labour and it give them business. We also do many collaborations provincially. We love working within a supplier’s core competency to produce something great together....We’re working really hard as an organization to develop relationships. We go direct supply. We’re also working with our food distributors to ensure great lines of supply and generally people have been really receptive... We can really leverage our buying power and as a result work with smaller farms successfully because we have the purchasing power to do so.” Anonymous 2

“Since I moved here I’ve met with a lot of local farmers and local ranchers and tried to understand their philosophies, their farms, and what they give to the area and really support them as much as we possibly can.” Robert

“Production wise we have a sweet relationship with Valbella so I’m able to harvest here in the garden and use their cold storage which is really amazing.” Christian

“One of the things I appreciate in the Banff context is the collaboration between the non-profit sector – so in this case the Banff Food Rescue and Bow Valley Food Alliance – and the Town. In

other communities I've lived in there hasn't been the same strength of support from the municipality to the non-profit sector. I love watching it. It's really interesting and seems very productive. It would be valuable to hear what that feels like from the non-profit sector because right now I'm coming from the municipal context. I value that there's support from the town for these things. Ultimately there's huge benefit to the community." Shannon

"When we started delivering food to the Food Bank in Morley there was animosity and no trust and it was really uncomfortable to drive out there every Wednesday and deliver food. But once they saw that we weren't going anywhere, we started developing a relationship with a few community members. Donating meat was also an important factor. I think it really started to show that we cared and that there was no other agenda other than to make sure people had access to good food. I would love to see those kinds of relationships and connections strengthened." Laurelle

"BCCF helped facilitate one of the first conversations focused on food that brought together people from Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore, and Exshaw. Jill had obviously been doing work in this area before but this conversation really brought together everyone who'd applied for a food grant or who were working in the food area." Corrie

"I'd love to find a way of working with Indigenous communities. I haven't figured out how to do that yet. We had one person who did the First Nations Lunch. For the Parks and recreation day she came in and made bannock. I wish we could have more connections like that. But trying to do it in a way that is respectful is hard. And a food alliance is so western. Do we need to find another mechanism, another way of working together?" Jill

9. Food Boxes

Multiple interviewees talked about how various food boxes in Banff provide people with access to fresh nutritious produce both through the sale of their food as well as through donations. While Farmbox (now Organic Box) and Spud both focus on sourcing environmentally sustainable and ethical produce, programs like the Good Food Box provide a cheaper option for fresh produce.

"The food box programs are great, especially Farmbox, they source their food vendors very carefully. Things like that should be subsidized by the town for low income families. I think that would be great." Rene

"Farmbox has been a huge addition to the Valley. It's excellent but it's pricey. They give us a ton of stuff for the Canmore Food and Friends dinners. They give us food that they haven't been able to sell at the market. They've asked us: 'Can you use two cases of jicama?' And I say: 'I guess! What is it?' We used some in our salad and gave the rest away." Carol

"Farmbox is the most local and direct way to access small scale organic food in the Bow Valley." Laurelle

“Farm Box provides people with choice. The Good Food Box program also has potential for helping people get fresh produce. However, I’m not sure people know about it.” Anonymous 1

“Spud now delivers to Banff which provides some more options but it’s not local. It’s local Alberta but it’s not local Banff. It’s tricky to get more local produce.” Dawn

“Starting in 2010, I helped grow Farmbox, with a desire to support small scale agriculture. Through Farmbox, we brought in food from small-scale organic farmers in Alberta and B.C. We brought in vegetables and fruit and then meat and eggs. We started it because there were no other options. You could go to the grocery stores and get wilted organic kale from California. As we’ve grown, Farmbox and now Organic Box donates to several community programs including community lunches and dinners at the seniors center, Canmore Food and Friends, as well as to the Food Bank in Morley.” Avni

10. Grocery stores

Multiple interviewees talked about the role grocery stores play in Banff to ensure food is accessible to community members as well as donating food to different community initiatives. Interviewees appreciated being able to request items and several people highlighted Nesters as a key space where community members shop.

“At Nesters if you want something brought in, you can fill out a form. Because they’re a smaller grocery store, you’re able to give them feedback so that’s one small way people can have influence over what foods they have access to.” Heather

“Both stores – both IGA and Nesters have been very forthcoming in at least telling people they’ll order products if people come and ask.” Kevin

“Nesters has a good range of local produce that they bring in depending on the season.” Andrew

“I’d say Nesters is my favourite place to shop. The quality of their meat is really good. The only thing is in terms of vegetables and other items like spices, they’ve just got the basic things. It’s nothing fancy but you can create something with it.” Said

“Nesters is important for the community. It’s where the local community shops.” Dawn

“I will say that our grocery stores here are extremely generous about supporting community events – like folk festival, like bike races, like Christmas hamper programs.” Carol

“25 years ago there weren’t any ethnic foods in the grocery stores. Now there is much more diversity of food although that only happens if the community goes into the stores and asks for it.” Jill

“Some of the grocery stores are stocking some Filipino foods and there are some Asian stores popping up in Banff which help people access different cultural foods.” Rene

11. Food Bank

Several interviewees talked about how the food bank is an important space for food insecure individuals (such as families, seniors, and seasonal service industry staff) to access food. While people spoke about the current need for the food bank, they also expressed concern that food banks only address the very tip of food issues present in Banff.

“The seniors population is on a fixed income, so are summer staff, and so are families. They all really enjoy the Thursday luncheons and the supper and the Banff Food Bank.” Wilena

“The church isn’t involved in giving out groceries – we just host the food bank. Generally at the food bank, they give people staples like milk and cheese. It’s mostly canned stuff and they give out two big bags. There are a lot of dedicated volunteers who make the food bank run. The shopping alone for the Food Bank is almost a full-time job. Originally, when the Food Bank opened last September you could come every week and people didn’t have to sign up. You could come every week for six consecutive weeks if you wanted. But then they changed it to what Canmore does. Now people need to be signed in, they have to show ID, and they can come once a month for as long as they like. I think that decreased the number of people accessing the Food Bank. I remember last year we were getting over 100 people coming in on a Tuesday. In a month, I think they got over 500 people and they were sitting everywhere. As a result, people were taking all the food and it wasn’t sustainable. So they’ve gone the way that Canmore does. I’d say now about 50-60 people drop in. Before this once a month rule it was overwhelming with the amount of people coming to us.” Nigel

“People definitely access food through the food bank. I’m thankful that laws have changed from accessing 6 times a year to 12.” Zarifa

Interviewees mentioned several other food-related programs, initiatives, and businesses that do important work in Banff including: BanffLife, Healthy Moms Healthy Babies, Alpine Edibles, Christmas Hamper Campaigns, Valbella Gourmet Foods, the Bare Minimum Project, Bow Valley Naturalists, and the Straws Suck Campaign.

RESEARCH REPORT: KEY FOOD ISSUES IN BANFF

The research outlined below describes nine key food issues as explained by Bow Valley community members. While the below quotations and issues have been divided into separate themes, they are all interrelated.

1. Affordability

Affordability was the issue mentioned most often throughout the interviews. In particular, interviewees talked about the high cost of food in Banff and the Bow Valley more generally, emphasizing that healthy foods, including basic staples were very expensive. Interviewees also underlined how the cost of food is exacerbated by the cost of housing as well as low wages offered by many employers. Several interviewees talked about how some people in Banff face the choice between paying for housing or paying for groceries.

“I watched a kid in the grocery store yesterday, he was probably 23 years old and he bought salad makings, some whole wheat bread, some fruit, some milk and paid \$53.00. There was no junk in there. I was astounded - if you’re taking home \$800 a month off your job and this is less than a week’s groceries, that’s crazy... Often when you’re not taking home much money and you’re not getting ahead of the day, people cheap out. They buy Raman noodles, pasta, the quick and dirty. To buy really healthy ready-made food is really expensive.” Carol

“When you see the cost of produce and you see the cost of cheese and you see the cost of the foods that our populations really want to be able to purchase, it’s just prohibitive.” Jill

“The affordability of the cost of living poses a problem for food because we know that other aspects of life, whether it be rent or other costs of living, they’re going to take priority before purchasing groceries. People are going to pay for those things before they buy their food.” Anonymous 1

“The cost of living is high and you often you see people leave – particularly if they want to advance their careers, if they want a house, if they want kids. They do the math and they can’t make it work here. How does that relate to food in Banff? Food is one of those extra costs and when you can’t make it or grow it there’s no alleviating that food bill.” Corrie

“Wages are often not very high, so often there’s not enough left over for food. Pay in the service industry is low.” Nickie

“In the Bow Valley there’s a definite disparity in income classes so I think affordability is a huge piece. Not necessarily being able to pay for the price of food but food combined with rent, combined with many other things. I think that is a huge challenge for people.” Laurelle

“You see the pressure of choosing between paying for rent and buying groceries as the cost of accommodation is not compatible with wages.” Kevin

“People’s priority is rent, their second is food....When my family came here, my presumption was that we would all be together. But now? Disintegration. My kids are in Calgary. My wife is in Fort Mac. And I’m here. Filipino families have been forced to disintegrate for survival and food is part of that. Families disintegrate because they need to be in different places in order to increase their income – the cost of food is one of the reasons families need to increase their incomes and they are forced to live in different places...yes, there are lots of jobs in Banff but they are survival jobs.” Jun

Interviewees also spoke about the difficulty that certain groups of people face in relation to the high cost of food in Banff. In particular, interviewees pointed out that mothers, seniors, and service workers are some of the groups most likely to face food insecurity in Banff.

“[In terms of the most vulnerable people in relation to food], I would say moms with kids because you’ve got the glass ceiling. They’re not going to get that well-paying job. Because they have kids they’re going to get discriminated against because they’re not going to be able to put the hours in to get that better paying job.” Kevin

“I think the biggest issue for the mothers I work with is that they are very tight for cash by the time they pay their very high rent and their bills. There’s just not a lot left over for groceries which they find very expensive in the Bow Valley....if they are trying to provide for their families by shopping in the grocery stores in Banff they find it very very expensive and they find they can only afford the unhealthy foods that I don’t recommend.” Erin

“Some of the people who used the food bank when I was involved were service workers that came to town. Their jobs would hold back one paycheck. They’d work for a two week period and they’d hardly get enough to live on because money was held back so they’d have to come to the food bank. I think that’s ridiculous. That’s totally wrong.” Wilena

“What I see is a very rich town with many people getting awfully fat on temporary workers. And they’re not treating them well...they’re being paid minimum wage and they’re four to a room in staff accommodation. Four to a room and they charge them \$500 a month! There’s one group with 15 in the house and there’s two bathrooms and one kitchen...they treat them like this and they don’t provide for them. Some do but a lot don’t. For example, there’s one string of hotels, they tell their workers to come over to the church for lunch. They don’t provide it. Isn’t that nice, eh? You want lunch? Go to the church, it’s free. There’s a lot of people getting rich off these temporary workers. It’s a shame because we’re getting people coming here from really poor countries and then getting treated like that. Banff is a very expensive place to live plus a lot of people are working all the hours. Most of them are just getting a day off [per week]. Businesses exploit people so then the Town of Banff has to kick in with BanffLife and community meals to make up the shortfall. I think there should be some more responsibility upon the businesses. I don’t know if they directly give to BanffLife or these community meals but somehow I think it should be evened out. Because they’re doing very well on these young people. And by the way they’re treated they don’t value them very much because there’s always someone else who’ll come. They just see them as commodities.” Nigel

Lastly, when some of the people I interviewed talked about the high cost of living, they mentioned the common attitude in Banff that ‘if you can’t afford food and housing, then you should move elsewhere.’ In doing so, people highlighted how this discriminatory attitude damages people’s sense of community while at the same time failing to address the underlying causes of poverty and food insecurity. Several interviewees suggested that if Banff perpetuates this kind of attitude that the remaining population will lack both services and diversity.

“We often hear: if you can’t afford to be here, just move out. You’re fortunate to live in such a beautiful national park, so don’t complain...Banff is harsh. They say: If you cannot make ends meet, then just go.” Sachiko

“In our community there’s a lot of families who find the cost of living in Banff very high. People have told us: ‘So go out of Banff.’ That’s too discriminating because with that attitude it’s like Banff is just for the well to do families. It’s difficult to survive here if you’re not well to do. But if we can solve food issues for families it would be a big boost in their survival. We are keeping this community diverse but it’s hard to survive here.” Jun

“People say: if you can’t afford to be here, you should leave. But who’s going to serve you breakfast? As I tell some cranky old people: Do you understand this kid will wipe your bum someday?” Kevin

2. Lack of space: to grow, prepare, and gather

Interviewees also talked about a lack of space for growing, preparing, and processing food as well as limited places to gather around food. Of course, this runs parallel to issues of affordability, with high rents meaning that space is at a premium. In the following section, interviewees talk about the lack of space that residents experience in relation to growing food in Banff.

“You see some backyard gardens. My grandmother she’s on Beaver Street, a little Italian lady, she’s had a garden back there for decades. But she’s got a fence around the garden. You know that goes back to affordability. Not everyone is living in a single-family house with a yard where you could do that. There’s lots of high density living in apartments and duplexes and fourplexes and you don’t have the physical space to garden. Although you see creativity. You see things being grown in windowsills where they can and out on patios away from wildlife. You see people try to make it work but on a mass scale, it’s hard.” Corrie

“Because Banff is in a national park you don’t have access to surrounding land for growing things.” Anonymous 1

“About two or three years ago we were at over 100 applications for community garden plots and had room for 60 spots so that’s a surplus of 40. More recently, we’ve been trending down to only 30 or so applicants who want a greenhouse plot but can’t get one. If we had a third greenhouse we would fulfill that need. However, I fully suspect that once we build a third greenhouse the numbers of people interested in garden plots would rise again and we’ll be in a state where we need more greenhouse space...I had a couple people say: ‘I was going to apply for a plot but I know I’m not going to get in so I didn’t apply.’” Andrew

In regards to individuals lacking adequate space to store, prepare and cook food, interviewees highlighted the challenges of living in staff accommodation, living in vehicles, or lacking housing altogether.

“It’s an issue to not have the right place to cook and access to decent food... When you have one kitchen and one fridge for 15 people in staff accommodations, you can’t have anything much in there that’s fresh. How does anyone cook when you’ve got 15 other people trying to cook? A lot of places just have hot plates and microwaves.” Nigel

“You can drive into Calgary. Spend your day off shopping for something cheaper. And then you need the storage capacity but most apartments only have a little freezer. I’m also just learning about the number of kids living in their cars. How do you cook then? You’re spending a lot of your money just on eating... The service workers are either living in staff accommodation and don’t have decent cooking facilities or these kids are living in their vehicles.” Carol

“We have an awful lot of people who are living in accommodations that are really not set up to cook. And that’s everything from not having fridge freezers to not having a proper stove. Shared kitchen accommodation can be complicated. Then you have staff accommodation, which is a different dynamic again. There may be a food plan that goes with it or there may be kitchen space that goes with it. But certainly what we hear anecdotally is it’s not providing people with the right tools and equipment and access that they need to be able to prepare proper meals.” Jill

“A lot of the people who work in hospitality don’t necessarily have access to kitchens. For example, a lot of the young adults living in staff accommodation share a kitchen with 7 people or they don’t have a kitchen. A lot of the foreign workers or people who are here on two year visas working in hospitality have access to the cafeteria and they eat from there. Literally some of my patient population live in a space that doesn’t even have a fridge. How is that allowed? That someone can live in an accommodation that doesn’t even have a hot plate and a hot plate is still pathetic! If we’re looking at health in all facets – mentally, physically emotionally, and spiritually - food is key to all of those. And if you have to eat in a cafeteria and you can’t prepare any of your own food, that’s a problem. So I’d love to see people have access to kitchens. For instance so they can cook culturally appropriate foods.” Zarifa

“Access to a fridge is difficult when you’re living in shared accommodations. There are good situations and bad situations in staff accommodations. I’ll honestly say it’s a whole lot better now than what it was in that a lot more employers are taking better stock of what their accommodations look like and there are some groups out there raising the bar which is good for everybody.” Kevin

“You need a place to store food and cook food. If you don’t have a roof over your head or you’re living in your car, you’re going to have to improvise. The food bank is not for everybody because you have to have a place to cook the food you get there... If people don’t have access to a cooking facility it’s hard.” Nickie

“In the summer, the YWCA has food boxes from the food bank but the people we see in the summer months don’t usually have access to a kitchen so we asked for a donation of a can opener so they can at least open a can!” Sachiho

“Storage and space is an issue. You need space in order to take advantage of sales and storing stuff.” Heather

Interviewees also pointed out that there is a lack of adequate space for public gatherings around food. In particular, interviewees talked about the lack of space to properly support community food programs such as community meals that encourage social gathering and wellbeing. Although many interviewees noted that 101 Bear Street is an incredibly valuable gathering space, they also talked about how this space is often not adequate to cook for and feed large numbers of people.

“Having enough public spaces for people to gather around food is a big issue in town. I’ve been having a bit of a discussion with the town about that. The one and only space we really have that’s a central location and meets basic needs is the senior’s center, the pioneer room, and it’s not big enough, and there’s all sorts of other issues - the kitchen is getting really shabby.” Heather

“The Thursday night dinners are pretty full in the senior’s hall so maybe they need something bigger. The Fenlands would be bigger but I don’t know if people would go out there.” Wilena

“I don’t think there are many public food spaces – especially those that serve a broad spectrum of ages....In terms of hosting community dinners in Banff, people who might organize it are saying: are you kidding me that’s too much! The little kitchen at 101 bear street is way too small and ill equipped for that kind of volume because once you build it they will come....finding space is a big challenge. You need a big room, you need a ton of volunteers, and you need a ton of equipment.” Carol

“There aren’t that many places for people to gather around food aside from the seniors center.” Said

“There’s a lack of appropriate food facilities that meet health code. For instance, I cannot offer our facilities for food because we do not meet health code. We can do it internally but we cannot do it for the public. And the cost to make that happen is too much. The Banff Park Church has done it, at great expense, but they’ve done it. I think the United Church and the Catholic Church have it in town. So there’s three kitchens that are commercially viable in town....You look at the food recovery programmes - they obviously need space and place. What happens when the generosity of 117th Spray runs out because that’s obviously a residence.” Kevin

In addition to speaking about challenges related to space faced by community members, interviewees also spoke about a lack of affordable space for small food businesses and chef-driven restaurants.

“If it’s not franchised, it’s really hard to make it work. The cost is high to run a business here. Running an independent business is risky here.” Said

“Rents are incredibly high in Banff. When you get the chef and owner partnerships the chefs always have to sacrifice ingredients for cheaper ingredients to make their meals so that they can pay rent... We have 256 bars and restaurants in this town and besides the Block I think a lot of them are not that great and one of the reasons is food costs. They have to really watch their food costs in order to pay the crazy rents in town.” Rene

“We need more chef driven restaurants here but price per square foot on any restaurant is not cheap.” Robert

“I know that kitchen commercial space is expensive. It’s a bit of a challenge for small businesses trying to get started. They even come to Canmore to make food. A commercial kitchen that’s affordable might be useful.” Avni

3. Availability

After affordability and space, interviewees talked about the lack of availability of certain foods in Banff. Overall, there was a sense that access to fresh, healthy, seasonal, and local foods was lacking not only for individual households but also for restaurants and food programs, such as community meals.

“There’s food everywhere. We’ve got more restaurants than we need – at least for a local population. But depending on your work, depending on your work hours, if you go after work there may not be fresh fruit in the grocery store that’s palatable. You’re stuck with the stuff that’s been picked over. And then you’re working by the time they stock the shelves. That happens to us. Sometimes we don’t even get milk. You see those pressures.” Kevin

“I’d like to see less junk, less processed, more opportunities for not making people spend all their time cooking but just be able to eat better.” Heather

“Because we live in Banff we’re kind of isolated here as far as produce goes.” Rene

“Society is really disassociated from food. You go to a grocery store and 70% of things in there aren’t even food. They’re process packaged labelled products made by food scientists. There’s not a big enough produce section.” Dawn

“It’s really tough to get the items that you want to cook, it’s really tough, because whenever you want to do something, you need to go either to Canmore or bring things from Calgary – that’s where you find everything you need. Buying cheaper groceries is important especially if you are cooking for 150 or 300 people at a community meal. Every dime counts. You want to make sure that if you’re only able to buy 6 or 7 kilos from here, then you’re going to Calgary where you can buy 10 or 15 kilos.” Said

Some interviewees also talked about the lack of ecologically friendly and organic produce, as well as the lack of healthy foods in public facilities such as the recreation center and schools.

“In the Bow Valley, I think a huge problem is access all year round to local and organic food and having access to small-scale ethically grown food....Even when stores in the Bow Valley are pro-organics they’re often not providing produce from small-scale direct organic farms. Instead, they’re buying from a larger scale of agriculture and the cost and quality isn’t comparable. Then we have our farmers market but our farmers market looks a little bit different from other farmers markets because other than Glen, who doesn’t sell organic foods, we don’t have direct producers showing up for the market.” Laurelle

“The food available doesn’t really promote ecological sustainability – maybe Spud does a little bit and the market is good because you can bring your own bags – but in general there’s a lot of unsustainable not good stuff that’s packaged, processed, and so on.” Dawn

“There are many people in Banff who want that choice of organic produce and organic foods but there’s not a lot of items to choose from so it’s a struggle of accepting ‘this is what it is’ and I definitely struggled with that because the variety wasn’t there...You sometimes make a choice you don’t want to make – but you work hard to hope that some nutritional foods are available that have not traveled great distances or are packaged. I am more accepting of: ‘yes, this is how much it’s going to cost, this is how long it’s sat on the shelves, this is the freshness of it.’” Sue

“One barrier is access to foods that are in season. I would also say access to smaller boutique farms that might not have the production required for our restaurant output.” Anonymous 2

“When I go to the rec center and smell the hotdogs, I’d say healthy foods are lacking [in public facilities]. Additionally I think we can go way beyond current high school programs supporting kids who don’t have enough to eat. I’m really disappointed. It’s restaurant food or it’s hot dogs and that kind of stuff.” Heather

“The unique piece about Banff is that institutions love trying to work with our hospitality industry, with our food services industry. It’s a huge economic saver when a restaurant offers to provide food for a school lunch program but what are they getting? What control is there over the nutrient sources? That concerns me a lot.” Jill

Another key issue in relation to availability was the lack of culturally appropriate food. Although many talked about the absence of cultural foods in Banff, interviewees also discussed this lack of availability in relation to affordability, explaining that when cultural foods are stocked in Banff they are often very expensive. Similar to issues outlined above, the lack of cultural foods affects both individuals and businesses.

“Although there is a small and helpful Japanese store and maybe two Filipino stores open in Banff, I think it’s not enough. There’s not enough cultural foods you might want to use. Often we have to go to Calgary every single week. Most of my friends go to Calgary every week or every two weeks. To buy some of the cultural foods that are available in Banff, the prices are double or

one and a half times the amount they are in Calgary. Everyone goes to the Chinese store in Calgary.” Sachiko

“We need to go to Calgary in order to get cultural foods. The price is much higher here so many in the Filipino community travel into Calgary.” Jun

“You hear of a lot of people needing to go into the city to get certain types of foods that they’re used to getting at home if they’re not from Canada.” Anonymous 1

“Finding culturally appropriate food is definitely a struggle for people. Banff has so many people from different countries and people want to make their traditional food and they have to get connected with somebody because they often don’t have a car to get to Calgary to purchase the things they need...the acculturation into western societies always has a negative impact on people’s health so it would be great if they could continue eating their cultural foods because it actually decreases their risk of chronic disease. There is some very small availability but as a whole there’s definitely a lack of access to culturally appropriate foods in the Bow Valley... I don’t know of any programs that support people to access culturally appropriate food. The monthly community dinners are great but they’re not enough.” Zarifa

“I feel for our new immigrant population because they really struggle to access food that is the food they want to eat. It’s both access as in it’s not available in the valley or it’s cost prohibitive. Many of them work within the food industry so their fall back is to eat the food that they serve, which might not always be the most nutritious option.” Jill

“You really have to stretch and go to Calgary if not farther to be able to get some international ingredients. So it’s a struggle because sometimes we have to order up to almost a month in advance and sometimes we don’t have that kind of notice with some of the functions we have - for example, a quick pop up party. You might have a day or two and have to be very creative and think outside the box when creating those menus.” Robert

“It can definitely prove to be difficult to get some of the key flavour profile contributing ingredients [for ethnic menu items] but again that’s on the rise.” Anonymous 2

People talked about this lack of availability as being a result of several issues including the remote location of Banff, short growing season, food tariffs, lack of appropriate transportation to Calgary or Canmore to purchase foods not available in Banff, and lack of local food production (in particular lack of Bow Valley-based farmers). Interviewees talked about lack of access being a barrier for individuals, families, and businesses. Some also talked about the dangers of being overly dependent on far-away food sources, particularly when a crisis cuts the Bow Valley off from its usual food supplies.

“Being in somewhat of a remote mountain town you can obviously see the supply chain is affected by seasonality and getting things from point A to point B can be difficult.” Anonymous 2

“Obviously being in Alberta and how cold it is can be an issue. We have eight months of the year when we don’t have fresh produce from our local area. This means trying to work with other

suppliers who can give us the same type of quality product. It's a struggle because of the amount of tariffs on some of the products we get from the U.S. It's also an issue because the quality sometimes suffers - we can't always get it here as quick as we want." Robert

"We live in a two B growing zone so it can be difficult to grow things here. Affordability wise if you were to get local and organic food in Penticton it's probably half the price than if you were to get it here because it's farmers who are selling directly at the market. Whereas here in the Bow Valley we have to go through a business that is supporting those farmers. The cost of food is really expensive because we currently have to bring it into the valley from other parts of Alberta or B.C. I think a short growing season and our location impact our ability to get local organic products here. Not that we live in a food desert but almost." Laurelle

"Transportation is a challenge....Some families can't afford the time or the money to go into Calgary to shop cheaper." Rene

"We did a shopping survey a year ago. We had about 100 responses. We know that a third of the responses – it was mainly Banff residents we were talking too - are leaving the community to go shopping. And when we did the community assessment that came up – that people are going to Calgary. We don't have evidence but we suspect that car ownership may be based on groups getting to Calgary to buy food. We know that that's mainly culturally appropriate food." Jill

"Banff and Canmore are too far for farmers to come and there's not enough of us who are growing our own food here. The floods were our big eye opener when Banff was cut off from its normal food supplies. Banff would really have a tough time if it's cut off for any real length of time because there aren't any producers here. In terms of food, all you can do is stockpile in order to be read for a crisis situation." Avni

"We don't really have a farming community in the Bow Valley." Anonymous 1

"We aren't there yet when we're talking about sustainability and food because you need to be producing food for that to be attainable but we're not producing food in Banff. That's the next step in Banff." Jill

4. Access to and support for food programming

Interviewees also talked about the difficulties of accessing food programs such as the Good Food Box, the Food Bank, and Banff Food Rescue due to factors such as lack of transportation, stigma, types of foods available, and work schedules.

"I think when it comes to emergency food it's always going to be access: access with hours, access to information and the whole supply and demand and how we monitor it and how we deal with it. Because I know when we get burnt out we just cut off the supply." Kevin

"For the Good Food Box, there seems to be a barrier for two reasons. I think it's a wonderful resource but probably 90% of my group of mothers does not have access to a vehicle so they find it a lot to carry or pack in backpacks. The other thing is that the time for pickup is very short and often their husbands work more than one job. They often go back to work early before the year is

up or are working while they're pregnant and can't find the time off work to meet the window for pick up. So no vehicle and the very tight pick up window seem to be the biggest barriers to that resource." Erin

"Before this once a month rule at the food bank it was overwhelming with the amount of people coming to us. We didn't see any decline until the policies changed to say people could only access the food bank once a month. People still come around in the summer but it's closed in the summer." Nigel

"Recently there was a story saying that numbers have dropped at the food bank. Well yeh because who wants to go through that when there's other things that have sprung up to supplement? Between Canmore Food and Friends and the lunches that Jill does in Banff and the two food rescue operations you don't have to humiliate yourself at the food bank. What we're finding is that the food bank is still the go to donation place for both money and food, especially at Christmas, and their use is dropping which is not reflective of need at all, that's a very deceptive piece of information! They can't legally put anything in a hamper that's reached its best before date which is not expired food. So I will go and collect that food and use it in the food we cook at Food and Friends in Canmore. We're keeping food out of the landfill. We're keeping food costs down...and it's keeping food away from the garbage and keeping food in the hands of people that need it the most. Food banks have very strict rules on how often you can access a hamper and how much you have to document your financial situation." Carol

"While the food bank is designed to be accessed for the difficult times, if you're someone who's living with food insecurity all the time, only being able to access it six times a year seems like a cruel joke so it's good that it's now twelve times a year. It's a step in the right direction but it speaks to the fact that food banks aren't going to solve the problem and they shouldn't be. It's a much bigger systemic issue that the food system needs to be changed so that people can afford and have healthy nutritious food. Good food shouldn't be that expensive and hard to access." Zarifa

"I've found that with the food bank they want to know more and more about people's situation. It's hard enough to be there as it is." Nickie

"If we're talking about the food bank, part of the barrier for people to access it is not only the number of times but they also ask a bunch of questions while going through the application." Sachiho

"Alanna said to me: 'I haven't seen any Filipinos in line at food rescue.' And I said: 'That's because nobody wants to. Filipinos are very sensitive. They won't go asking and begging for food. They are strong and work hard.' It might help to change the approach because in Filipino culture we do not beg." Jun

"There's a challenge with Banff Food Rescue for certain groups of people. For example, in the Philippines there's the concept of Peg Peg. It's a whole food industry and they go way beyond what Banff Food Rescue does. Whatever people don't eat in the restaurant is scraped off and sold out the back door. So when you say food recovery, many people in the Filipino community

are thinking Peg Peg. They're not thinking produce and stuff that's never hit the table. And so Banff Food Rescue has a different meaning depending on where you're from....it's in the words and marketing of how we get it out there to be culturally sensitive to what might be someone else's interpretation." Kevin

In addition to the space constraints mentioned above, interviewees also talked about the ways that access to food programming is sometimes limited (or altogether absent) due to factors such as a lack of long-term sustainability, volunteer fatigue, and lack of funding.

"We've seen that some of the volunteers who do community food programs have been recognized and applauded. I'd like to believe that means the community sees the merit in these programs. But it's not sustainable. If we are primarily relying on a small number of volunteers, they're going to burn out." Corrie

"Due to budget cuts, the cooking circles for mothers were cut. During the circles we all got together and cooked things for the freezer and for meals. It would be enough to take home that night and enough for a serving for the freezing or it would baking – enough for that week and another batch for the freezer. I think they were great and they were well attended....it's a shame they were cut because I don't think they needed to happen as often as they were happening but I think that they would still be an important piece. As for a community kitchen on a larger scale than just my group, again it would have to include a meal that people could eat there and then the other thing is that it would have to be timed right because mothers have their babies. If child care isn't provided they can't really cook with the baby and the husband works shift work opposite the mom and they switch off." Erin

"Much of community food programming is done on the backs of volunteers or off the side of the desk of a teacher. For example, one person I know who runs a community food program told me: 'The town needs to institute this program as a municipal program. I can't keep doing this forever on my own.' She's quite right. If the town wants this, the town better step up to it. If it benefits all, all should pay...the volunteer base is getting burned out." Carol

"There's a lot of things that make me think: 'We should do this, we should do that.' But then it trickles away because we don't have enough people or time or resources or I get busy or someone else gets busy. That's the part I struggle with - the model we use to run the greenhouse works now but if we make it larger are we opening up ourselves for failure? Will we over expand beyond our capacities? Right now the greenhouse is manageable but at the same time I'd love to see it double the size. I'd say it would take a very strong board that would receive at least some sort of funds on an annual basis – even 10 or 20 grand to manage the program and market it. All those things cost money. Right now it's: 'We should hold a bake sale, we should hold this or that.' But that's not enough and it leads to fatigue of the board." Andrew

5. Feeling that food in Banff isn't meant for locals and that food issues are often dismissed

Another challenge people spoke about was the feeling that the food system in Banff is primarily geared towards tourists rather than locals. For example, people talked about the fact that although

food is celebrated in Banff, this often occurs on a fine dining level or at festivals that aren't accessible to many local community members.

"Because we're not a high growing agricultural hub like other communities we don't seem to have food festivals or events going on here. The food festivals we do have are more gentrified and marketed to wealthy individuals who can buy tickets. These kinds of events are not really celebrating local food for locals." Laurelle

"When you talk about the food industry in Banff, people generally think about fine dining...food is celebrated here but at a fine dining level." Corrie

"We excel at giving a great performance. It's like walking the streets of Disney land. But it's like: Banff ain't nothing for free and you're talking our bread and butter, this is what we make money on. So yes, we do it very well, but making it meaningful for those who live here, that's the backside of it. There's definitely people working on it but I think we've still got a long way to go." Kevin

"Food is celebrated in Banff to some extent from a tourist and business perspective. There's definitely more that can be done on a community front to celebrate." Zarifa

"Because Banff is more catered to tourists we don't always have the facilities set up for those bigger community projects because we're a smaller community in a really big tourist industry...I'd say people don't feel like they have decision-making power over the food that's available in Banff because it caters to tourists, four million of them. It's hard to compete although I think the town does what it can." Dawn

"A lot of the restaurants have to be geared towards tourists in order to fill the seats. Having an entrepreneurial look at it, I completely get it. But I also think that we need to have those restaurants that can be filled with locals every single day and all the workers that are in the area and the entire Bow Valley." Robert

"I think for the most part the food and beverage industry for a big chunk of the year is really not about the locals. You know we take advantage of the locals specials...we have in the Bow Valley some of the best restaurants in Alberta...but who's going to spend \$70-80 to go out for dinner when that's a big chunk of your grocery budget?" Carol

"Because our little town of 8,000 people expands to millions. It can be challenging to find that place to gather and sit calmly and have a great time." Anonymous 2

"This town is unfortunately geared towards tourists and that's where the money is so locals suffer a little...For example, in our grocery stores all the end aisles are filled with maple candies and smoked salmon for the tourists...we need more hole in the wall, tucked away restaurants that service the locals." Rene

"Because we're a smaller town with a huge tourist population, it would be nice if stores stocked some family sizes. Not all of us need individual servings." Kevin

Interviewees also talked about how perceptions of Banff as a beautiful destination and tourist attraction often overshadows the more challenging aspects of the community. Some interviewees felt that difficult issues such as food insecurity were ‘brushed under the rug’ in order for Banff to maintain its reputation as an attractive destination.

“When you see the magnificence of Banff it’s really hard to see the dirty corners of your community. It’s important to help those in leadership positions understand there is a real need here for support and policy change. We need to get policy makers to see the Bow Valley as a place where the same food challenges exist as in cities, and in some cases, these issues are probably amplified.” Jill

“Because this is a major tourist destination, the tourist comes first. Business has a bigger voice than social services. They want Banff to look beautiful and gorgeous and be a happy place and everyone is excited. They don’t want the reputation that we have issues. I think they recognize that issues exist but they don’t want those issues to surface.” Sachiko

“The message here is: ‘Look at the mountains, life is beautiful.’ I’m not begrudging that because I understand. But at the same time you have humanity, you have people who are not able to make ends meet who have made this their home. I see people just like I saw people in Calgary sleeping hard. There’s people for numerous reasons who can’t sustain housing.” Nickie

“I was taken aback on the topic of poverty and food insecurity. Poverty just seems not to be on people’s lips. For whatever reason, they don’t want to use that word.” Sue

Related to the feeling that difficult issues are often pushed to the side in public forums, interviewees also talked about a lack of conversation and understanding about food issues more generally in the community.

“One of the biggest things is bringing food and food issues to the attention of key decision makers in Banff. I know this is part of the work this research is doing - having some information that is local that will help to feed key messages about food insecurity. But I think the biggest best thing we need to do is get this on the agenda so that it becomes a priority because if it’s not something decision-makers are looking at it’s going to be a challenge.” Anonymous 1

“This place needs conversations about food to happen more frequently with more people...I went to a local municipal election last year and thought: ‘I’ll ask a question with regards to the Food Alliance and poverty.’ I knew my question would create some shaking of heads because what do you mean by food security, what do you mean by poverty? And it did. My query was that there seems to be an issue of affordable nutritious food in Banff since I’ve moved here. And the answer I got was: ‘There’s a food bank for that.’ I thought: ‘Well, you’ve got a lot of listening to do.’” Sue

“I don’t know if we’ve had a community wide discussion about food. I think we’ve had lots of Bow Valley discussions through this Alliance but I don’t know if Banff has sat down and fully said: ‘yes, food is a problem.’” Corrie

“I think there’s a lack of conversation about food in Banff. People are trying but communication still has to be improved.” Wilena

“The key issue around food is that people don’t talk about it. People talk about housing but I think the reality is that people have to choose either housing or food. That’s the reality. People want to talk about housing in the Bow Valley but they don’t want to talk about homelessness. It’s kind of the same thing. They want to talk about affordable food or food programs but they don’t want to talk about food insecurity.” Sachihō

6. Policy

Building on the last point that Banff lacks a robust public conversation about food issues in the community, interviewees also talked about how food is not a central focus of municipal councils and that Banff lacks policies that support healthy, sustainable, and affordable food systems. Interviewees also talked about the lack of procurement policies that promote sustainable, healthy, and local food in institutions such as hospitals and schools.

“I feel like food directly isn’t on the agenda of the town.” Laurelle

“I took a look at the Town of Banff bylaws and policy work but I didn’t see any policies regarding food related issue and concerns.” Sue

“There is no school food policy in the Bow Valley.” Carol

“There aren’t many policies for people to access healthy affordable food because this town is designed for tourism....they don’t see or just ignore these issues, the people who run this town. When the NDP government came and said they’d raise the minimum wage to \$15.00, Banff Lake Louise Tourism went to lobby the provincial government to say: no, the service industry cannot pay for that. The owners didn’t want to pay. All the businesses make lots of money. Although it’s different for small businesses I recognize that.” Sachihō

“I’m not aware of any municipal policies that support local healthy food aside from Food Alliance and their work.” Dawn

In terms of existing policies, several interviewees talked about how wildlife related policies restrict people’s ability to grow food in the Bow Valley – both for community members and for people who farm for a living.

“If I look at Banff specifically, there’s an issue related to our location in a national park with wildlife. The messaging around wildlife is not to feed them and not to attract them. As a result we’ve done a lot of work trying to replace fruit bearing trees with non-fruit bearing trees because they attract the bears into town. I think that’s definitely a challenge we have in terms of growing your own food in Banff. Right away there’s a rule that says you can’t do that.” Corrie

“We’re in the unique position of being in a national park where there are federal policies established by Parks Canada that affect where you can grow. We did hard side greenhouses because we were concerned about wildlife. But wildlife hasn’t been an issue in our greenhouses. However, if we wanted to build raised gardening boxes on the ground, we’d have to have a high fence which would increase our costs.” Andrew

“It’s definitely challenging to grow food in the Bow Valley. For example, for Alpine Edibles [in Canmore] we have a 15 foot fence that was \$15,000 for just under a quarter acre of land and there’s a \$10,000 fine if we bring in any bear attractants so that makes running a garden really challenging. The fact that we can’t grow fruit here makes it really challenging because fruit helps us as farmers to be more economically sustainable. People are willing to pay a higher cost for fruit than they are for vegetables. Living in a zone with these kinds of policies makes farming for a living challenging.” Laurelle

“I understand our wildlife rules. However, the bylaws are ridiculously vague so it scares a lot of people off of growing their own food. There’s a lot of things I wish we could grow which would provide perennial abundance but we’re not allowed to grow those things because of the potential for attracting dangerous wildlife. Berry bushes and fruit trees are some of the best things you can grow in a garden. We consulted with Alberta Parks and Environment and that was the condition for this school garden project. We aren’t allowed to plant berry bushes and fruit trees because you don’t want apex predators coming into the school yard. I understand that concern but there are other options. For example, having somewhere to grow out of town surrounded by an electric fence.

Another big issue is access to fertility inputs [for food production]. We’re not allowed at this point to compost here in the Bow Valley. If I want to cycle nutrients here in town it’s either really difficult or impossible so when I get a truck to come up from Calgary that’s a \$300 trucking cost. To be able to trouble shoot that and create our own local fertility through our own waste would be the thing that makes the most sense in terms of moving forward growing food.

Another issue is that we are not allowed to have chickens. However, we do have chickens at the high school [in Canmore] and they’re an amazing element to bring into a growing system. They have so much to offer. Not just the eggs and the companionship. I had major slug problems at the high school and used the chickens to eradicate them. I hope we can find a compatible middle ground between being very cautious about our wildlife but also finding something that helps us gain more food sovereignty.” Christian

7. Community decision-making and ability to shape food systems in Banff

Interviewees also talked about the feeling that community members lack control over food systems in the Bow Valley. When I asked interviewees whether they thought community members felt they were able to meaningfully contribute to decision-making relating to food in Banff, the majority answered with a simple ‘no.’ However, numerous interviewees noted that the work of certain groups in the Valley has helped to empower some people to have more of an influence over food systems.

“I don’t think people really feel they have influence over food in Banff except for what Jill and Ruth are doing with the conversations and getting people together to talk about food...I think people are pretty helpless. They just arrive here and go with whatever is going on.” Nigel

“I don’t think people feel they have power to influence food in Banff at all, it’s just whatever the alga rhythm figures out at IGA or Nesters. They find out what they’ve sold and then they stock that or slight variances on what sells best. I guess the shoppers dictate what we’re able to buy but we have a lot of tourists in town so that’s a bit skewed.” Rene

“Generally, I don’t think people feel they have the ability to influence decision-making around food systems and where their food comes from. I think they feel pretty powerless about it.”

Christian

“I don’t think people in the community feel like they have the ability to contribute to decisions about food.” Sue

“I think we need to hear from people who are in situations of food insecurity. Politicians are able to make decisions about food but they don’t face the realities of food insecurity. People often assume what’s needed for those who are struggling but we need to make sure the voices of those who experience food insecurity are heard. However, it’s difficult because often they don’t have the time because they work all the time, they have two jobs, or are looking after their kids.” Sachihō

“Those who are so inclined might be able to participate in decision-making processes that shape food systems in Banff, I just don’t think enough people are inclined to and I don’t think enough people have the time. To live in Banff is expensive and usually you’re living in staff accommodation. So you’re eating Sysco and GFS food because that’s what you’re making for everyone else. I don’t think there’s even time to think about it...One of the big issues is that people don’t question the status quo. You just have to go to the grocery store and fight all of the tourists. And that’s just what you have to do. That’s not what you have to do!” Avni

“As is the case in many places throughout Canada, the food supply is dependent upon key transportation networks like the Trans Canada Highway and the railway. When incidents like the flood occur, these networks can be cut off. Lack of control over our food supply is definitely an issue to consider.” Jill

8. Education

Several interviewees talked about a lack of education in schools, at a family level, and more generally in regards to basic food skills such as growing, buying, and preparing food. Interviewees also talked about a general lack of knowledge about healthy diets and nutrition as well as food insecurity and how food systems work.

“I would say a key issue is education. I would say not knowing how to cook. For example, not knowing how to cook veggies...I think education is the biggest biggest thing for people to understand why they need to think about food. Why food sustainability is important. Why everybody having access to good food is important. How it makes a healthier stronger

community. How it helps mental health. People don't have a clue how much mental health is affected by food and lifestyle. I think there's a lot of education pieces that people don't know."
Dawn

"We're coming from this place right now where new parents didn't necessarily grow up with any knowledge of good nutrition so it's hard for them to teach it to their kids. Having proper nutrition education in schools would be amazing. Home Education taught basic life skills and we've substituted that for all sorts of things because apparently cooking is not important in your life. You can graduate high school and know complex algebra equations and not know how to cook three basic meals for yourself." Zarifa

"Some mothers that I work with say, in regards to programs like the Good Food Box, I don't know how to use all that so it goes to waste and it rots. I'll do a group on how to use the leftovers, how to make pasta sauces to freeze, and how to use certain vegetables people aren't familiar with." Erin

"People need to learn how to budget and how to cook and how to eat nutritionally well." Wilena

"I feel like we need to do a better job of educating people and raising awareness if we're going to be talking about food security - about how food banks are great but if food banks were doing their job they wouldn't exist. They're not actually solving the problem and they're not a solution. I feel like a lot of people don't necessarily see it that way or maybe they've just never heard it put a different way... There's also not a lot of messaging around sustainable food systems and how it relates to health." Anonymous 1

"Another big thing is trying to get the education aspect going about how to garden in the greenhouse. It's difficult with the amount of transition that we have." Andrew

"It's almost like I'm speaking a different language than other people when I talk about growing. I can't just talk about potting up and dampening off. People lack the basics when it comes to gardening." Christian

"There's an education piece that's lacking... For example, I think people aren't really understanding and asking the questions about where food is coming from and understanding the seasonality of food. People aren't as connected with the things coming out of the ground as they used to be." Avni

"I met with a number of managers who own properties in town who are very keen on reducing food waste and who are interested in donating to food waste programs. However, some of the managers were saying: 'We just don't understand what our responsibility is under food safety regulations and under the legal structure at the provincial level. What can we donate or not? And under what circumstances?' They were feeling like they couldn't donate at all because it's not proper from a legal standpoint... Some of the managers even mentioned they weren't sure when it was okay to leave it for staff to eat." Shannon

A few interviewees also talked about a lack of information about food programs available to those in need, including how and where to access them. Among interviewees themselves, there was often confusion about how, when, and where people could access basic food services like the food bank in Banff.

*“Young adults often don’t know where to access different food supports in the Bow Valley.”
Zarifa*

“I think there needs to be a bit more information about food programming including answers to questions such as: do you know how the food bank works? Do you know how the community supers work and how the luncheons on Thursday work? Do you know where the food comes from for those programs? Do you know the number of volunteers, the hours they spend taking the food donations from food rescue to make this wonderful borscht soup?” Wilena

9. Waste

Lastly, the people I interviewed talked about the issue of food waste both at commercial and household levels. For example, interviewees talked about the large quantities of food wasted in the hotels and at buffets and conferences in particular. Interviewees also pointed out the difficulties businesses face in finding space to run organics programs that work as well as underlining the high amount of edible foods that are still put into waste streams.

“Food waste is a real issue...Especially in the hotels, tons of food is wasted. I’ve witnessed tons of food waste. You cannot eat. They will restrict you if you try. The foods are there but you cannot touch it, you can only put it in the garbage. The hotels could donate it to the school or to people, especially in the summer when there’s lots of people in the side streets begging. It’s so desperate to see those people. Years ago when I was working I was going to give some of this wasted food to someone who needed it but then management saw me and suspended me. I just wanted to give it to these people. Why put it in the garbage?” Jun

“We are not doing a good enough job at organics recycling in our company. There’s a lot of reasons for it. It’s not because we’re lazy or we don’t want to. A lot of it is really crazy space constraints in our buildings. We have rooms that barely fit our garbage program let alone an organics program. We also have extremely high volumes in the restaurants that make it difficult to implement at any point. So we decided to stop looking at the reasons we can’t and started looking at the tiny shifts we can do. This year will be a big year for that. We’ve met with the Town of Banff, they were wonderful. We’ve met with their waste department and we gave them a bit of feedback about things that haven’t been going well that we think we could work on together. Little things as simple as putting yourself in the shoes of the venue and the people who are actually involved in waste disposal. For example, when a dishwasher is finishing off at the end of the night and is often one of the last employees in the building, they’re expected to carry a massive full-size garbage of organics waste down a flight of stairs. When it breaks you’re not setting that employee up for success. We should do half-sized bins so that smaller people can do it more easily and hoist it into the bin more easily. There should be better labeling on the bins. We should make it more of a ritual and a cultural fit and set people up to do it successfully. Those are all the things we’re looking at this year.” Anonymous 2

“Unfortunately the most food waste has to do with buffets. Whenever you see a buffet in the restaurant, in a venue, in a banquet event, you’re always going to have some type of food waste.” Robert

“One of the issues I’ve heard is the waste that goes on. We have lots of conferences here in town and the food that gets chucked at the end of that. I’ve heard people wonder: ‘What can we do with that?’” Corrie

“There’s a lot of food waste or food and food soiled paper still in the waste stream. Even though Banff has a composting program that collects food and food soiled paper from both the commercial/non-residential sector and the residential sector, there’s still a lot of opportunity to improve. In particular, there’s still a lot of food and food-soiled paper in the waste stream. In the residential sector it’s about 35% and in the commercial or non-residential sector it’s 48%. A little bit of that will be non-edible food. From a food lens, while there’s a fair bit that’s not edible, there are still a lot of materials going into the compost that are edible. This isn’t unusual. In many communities there’s still a lot of food and food soiled paper in the waste stream. Through the work I do with the Town of Banff, I often look at this issue from a waste lens, but I also think it’s really important to look at it from a food lens and acknowledge that above all we really want to ensure we’re diverting edible food out of the waste stream. If we do that everyone benefits because as a town we don’t need to manage that material within the waste stream, which has a cost associated with it. Most of all, we also benefit from a social, human, community and health perspective because it will mean that edible food is being eaten by people rather than being thrown away.” Shannon