



UTM STUDENTS' UNION DEMANDS FOR

FOOD SECURITY NOW

UTMSU LOBBY WEEK



INTRODUCTION

The right to food consists of availability, affordability and physical accessibility, adequacy, culturally appropriate and meeting the dietary needs of individuals, and the right to choice regarding food. (The Mississauga Food Bank, 2019). Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. It often goes unnoticed and undetected until it becomes detrimental to the individual. After tuition, rent and many other expenses are settled, a student's remaining budget for food can be sparse or non-existent. Food is more than often than not an afterthought for university students. Each year the University of Toronto provides financial assistance to students in need, but these are band-aid solutions that, while helpful in the short term, don't address the systemic roots of food insecurity. Additionally, access to daily necessities like inclusive types and a variety of food is often overlooked as a prominent issue that students face.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Increase food diversity on campus with improved access to vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, and gluten-free options.
- 2** Provide staff with proper training on how to make and serve diverse food options.
- 3** Have up-to-date quality control standards readily accessible to students every year.
- 4** Have direct and indirect feedback portals for food reviews, recommendations, and complaints.
- 5** Expand food service hours to accommodate students.
- 6** Establish a relationship with the UTM Food Centre to promote local waste reduction and improve food security on campus.

SUMMARY OF ISSUE

Food insecurity is a serious and growing problem for post-secondary students across the country, including UTM students. Food insecurity is a strong social determinant of health, and it can become closely linked to many negative health outcomes if it occurs long enough.

UTM specifically is a food desert, meaning that in order to access food off-campus, students either have to drive or take transit - local food options are limited and not easily accessible. UTM has a diverse population of students, many of whom eat a vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, or gluten-free diet. Many current food options either do not cater to these needs, have staff who are not properly trained on how to serve this food or what options are available, or the food quality does not satisfy students' needs. Due to UTM's position as a food desert, and because students often study late on campus, the ability to access food on campus anytime of the day, including in the evening and on weekends is a necessity. Additionally, this academic year has seen an increase in the number of complaints surrounding food quality, highlighting the need for up-to-date quality control standards to be made available to all students, and the creation of direct and indirect feedback portals for food reviews, recommendations, and complaints. Finally, combating food insecurity locally on campus, and providing resources to students in need is crucial: establishing a relationship with the UTM Food Centre, which already serves around 100 students every week, to promote local waste reduction and improve food security on campus is key.

Despite growing food prices, the UTMSU has received countless complaints about food quality on campus.

The use of the UTMSU Food Centre has increased by 600% following the pandemic, with an average of 87.5 students per week making use of this resource in 2022, compared to 12.5 students per week in 2019.

University students are more susceptible to hunger than the general population (Sing 2022). In Canada, 40% of post-secondary students are food insecure. These figures will likely have grown significantly during the pandemic (Hungry for knowledge, Meal Exchange).

CONSULTATIONS

The UTMSU has consulted with students through consistent and long-term outreach efforts, to get a comprehensive idea of students' experiences with food insecurity. All of the above recommendations are the results of students voicing the food related struggles they face on campus. Additionally, UTMSU staff have conducted an informal audit of food options available to UTM students to get a better understanding of key areas of improvement. This was conducted by asking every single vendor on campus whether they had vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, and/or gluten-free options, verifying whether those options were appropriately indicated on the menu, and what the opening hours were. These comments have been consistently brought up by UTMSU executives at the Food Advisory Committee meetings.

CONCLUSION

Food insecurity is a serious problem that students at UTM are facing. The recommendations outlined throughout this document are instrumental in combating food insecurity on campus, and ensuring we are not leaving any students struggling to make ends meet - students should never have to choose between affording their education, and paying for basic needs such as food, rent, or other basic life necessities. All students deserve affordable, accessible, high quality, and culturally appropriate food options to perform well in their studies.



APPENDIX

[Results from Food Audit](#)



UTMSU LOBBY DOCUMENT