



# Food Systems Cohort

PREPARED BY SUSAN GAO [JUNE, 2023]

PARTNER MENTOR: HILLARY STEVENS, LEVONNE ABSHIRE

PARTNER UNIT: [STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING](#)

SUSTAINABILITY HUB MENTOR: KSHAMTA HUNTER

## Introduction

Food is a human need that is vital to our wellbeing and provides us with necessary nutrients. However, food's impact spans beyond nutrition. Systems in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed can foster or hinder environmental sustainability (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], n.d.). Food systems that are sustainable create positive or neutral effects on the environment by supporting ecosystem health and minimizing carbon and water footprint (FAO, n.d.). In Canada, food systems confront a variety of issues such as difficulties aligning trade activity with sustainability goals and decarbonizing food practices (Corkal et al., 2021).

In addition, food systems that are socially sustainable are important in light of widespread food insecurity. A sustainable food system can be defined as a food system that ensures equitable access to food with practices that maintain social, environmental, and economic sustainability (FAO, n.d.). Food insecurity occurs when individuals are barred from accessing enough food due to circumstances that they cannot control such as economic factors and climate change (BC Centre for Disease Control [BCCDC], 2022). It disproportionately impacts those who are marginalized and experience structural discrimination (BCCDC, 2022). In this regard, it is valuable to explore how environmentally sustainable food systems can support food security and prioritize social justice.

## UBC Context

[UBC's Climate Action Plan 2030 \(CAP 2030\)](#) outlines the university's goal to achieve a 50% reduction in emissions from food systems by 2030. It details UBC's plans to address these emissions by implementing a Climate-Friendly Food System that promotes sustainable food habits and provides clearer sustainability guidelines to food providers. [UBC's Climate Emergency Task Force \(CETF\) Report](#) contains a strategic priority of fostering community wellbeing during times of climate crises. To provide this support, the CETF recommends that UBC raises more awareness about climate change in relation to food justice and public health. The CETF urges UBC to adopt local food system practices and resources in order to diminish food insecurity and protect vulnerable ecosystems. The Food Systems Cohort will heavily focus on the issues of public health and food security as emphasized by the CETF.



[UBC Sustainability Hub's Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#) outlines the Sustainability Hub's focus on the issues of biodiversity loss and species extinction, which are inextricably linked to food systems as food operations take a toll on the natural environment. The Hub also commits to promoting circular economies that encourage reuse and repair in order to reduce emissions from waste, including food waste. Both issue areas of biodiversity and circular economies are conducive to addressing the environmental aspect of sustainability within food systems, which will be a main focus in the cohort. Additionally, Goal #4 in the Strategic Plan is to incorporate principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) in all of the Hub's programs and initiatives. The JEDI principles will define much of the work in the Food Systems Cohort as they are important to raising the voices of marginalized communities who are most impacted by food injustice. Goal #15 details the Hub's aim to increase engagement and dialogue around sustainability issues, which the Food Systems Cohort will work towards by fostering dialogue on sustainable food systems in its projects and workshops.

Food insecurity is a significant issue on the UBC Vancouver campus. [UBC's Food Hub](#) reports that "35% of undergraduate students at UBC Vancouver" are food insecure (UBC Food Hub, n.d.). They explain that food insecurity harms students' physical and mental health, which deteriorates their capacity to learn and work (UBC Food Hub, n.d.). [The Community Food Hub Project](#) offers services that address food insecurity among students and promotes community and student engagement in combatting food insecurity. [UBC's Wellbeing Strategic Framework](#) outlines goals to provide culturally diverse, affordable, and healthy food at UBC and aims to diminish food insecurity at UBC by 2050.

## Learning Objectives

To advance UBC's endeavors to address environmental sustainability within food systems and the issue of food security, Sustainability Ambassadors in the Food Systems Cohort will engage in several educational opportunities and implement collaborative projects and workshops. They should allow these learning objectives to guide their journey in the program:

1. Ambassadors are able to collaborate with actors of various backgrounds and integrate diverse perspectives, especially those of marginalized communities, into their study of sustainable food systems.
2. Ambassadors are able to understand their own positions in food systems and draw from their unique abilities, knowledge, and experiences to raise awareness about sustainability issues within food systems.
3. Ambassadors are able to employ critical thinking and analytical skills when completing tasks on sustainability issues within food systems, while also being creative and innovative.



## Ambassador Projects

The first collaborative project that the sustainability ambassadors will work on is creating an educational video on the processes of the food system that are operating on the UBC Vancouver campus. The ambassadors will research and present about the processes of production, processing, consumption, and disposal on campus, paying special attention to how UBC is taking action to advance sustainability in each of them. This video project requires ambassadors to complete tasks such as connecting with campus organizations, writing scripts, conducting interviews, presenting, and editing. Ambassadors will collaborate with organizations and facilities such as UBC Farm, Sprouts, UBC Building Operations, and the Faculty of Land and Food Systems. This project allows ambassadors to be creative and analytical and provides them with the opportunity to learn about their own positions in the UBC food system with which they interact.

The second project that ambassadors will collaborate on is hosting a panel discussion event that focuses on the topic of decolonizing food systems in Canada, which will act as a culmination of all of the work that is done in the first video project. The video project sheds light on sustainability work that the food system currently does while the second project will focus on sparking conversations about how current food systems could be improved and made more sustainable with efforts to eradicate colonial influences. A main priority for this panel event will be to involve Indigenous speakers and bring attention to Indigenous knowledge on decolonizing food systems. Ambassadors will be responsible for doing research on the backgrounds of guest speakers, curating questions to ask at the panel, moderating and leading the panel discussion, and facilitating discussion sessions with the audience. This project will allow ambassadors to gain experience collaborating with diverse actors in the field of sustainability and food systems and learn how to examine food systems from diverse perspectives.

Projects and workshops in the Food Systems Cohort support various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including [SDG #2](#) on Zero Hunger, [SDG #10](#) on Reduced Inequalities, [SDG #12](#) on Responsible Consumption and Production, and [SDG #15](#) on Life on Land.



## References

BC Centre for Disease Control. (2022). *Defining food security & food insecurity in British Columbia*. Provincial Health Services Authority.

[http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/FoodSecurity\\_FoodInsecurity\\_Definitions\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/FoodSecurity_FoodInsecurity_Definitions_FINAL.pdf)

Corkal, V., Carmona, M., Puzyreva, M., Roy, D., Bizikova, L., Bath, S., Rooban, A., & Murphy, S. (2021, December 16). *Sustainable Food Systems in Canada*. International Institute for Sustainable Development. <https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/sustainable-food-systems-canada>

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (n.d.). *Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework*. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca2079en/CA2079EN.pdf>

UBC Food Hub. (n.d.). *About Us*. <https://foodhub.ubc.ca/about-us/>