

University of British Columbia

Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program

Student Research Report

# Advancing Thriving Community Food Hubs

## Piloting a Social Audit of the UBC Food Hub Market

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## PRACTITIONER SUMMARY

The UBC Food Hub Market (FHM) is a non-profit community space that is part of the UBC Food Security Initiative (FSI) which falls under the UBC Wellbeing Strategic Framework. This space aims to provide at-cost groceries, which means that the groceries are sold to staff, students, and the overall community on campus at the exact price they were ordered. Providing at-cost groceries is just one goal of the FHM, to name some others, the FHM aims to provide a welcoming space, promote social connection and promote food security (Food at UBC Vancouver, 2023).

Starting as a pilot project in early 2022, the FHM has gained a considerable amount of traction since it first opened, not only in the number of customers but also in volunteers as well. Therefore, some tremendous achievements have been made but there were some areas that needed improvement. Our project helped in finding what those improvements were and providing recommendations. This was done through conducting a social audit, which has a lot of different meanings depending on the purpose of an organization and its field. But in the context of our project, a social audit meant conducting in-person interviews “to review to what extent a [company] has reached their goals” (CFI, 2023). The in-person interviews, which was our primary data, were held during an event held at the FHM, posters were made to inform people as they walked in, and those who participated were given a small incentive of a Blue Chip cookie or a granola bar. The customers are a big part of the FHM progression but so are the volunteers. In the past, focus groups and surveys were conducted surrounding the customers who shopped there but not the volunteers who helped run the space. Therefore, we implemented questions that focused on the volunteers to obtain their feedback as well, and we also compared data from previous surveys which was our secondary data. The types of questions asked were; if there was an improvement in their food security knowledge since shopping at the FHM, was a feeling of connection with the UBC community made and if they felt that the FHM was a welcoming space. We made sure that our questions were in line with the FHM goals.

Promoting food security on campus is a challenge for sure and it is the first layer of the four that were created for this project to understand the working mechanisms of the FHM. First we have the campus where we are promoting food security, the second layer is the FHM which is part of the FSI, the third layer consists of the

volunteers that help run the space and lastly there are the customers which are the reason why the FHM is being supported and running. This challenge is tough to overcome but it should also be seen as an opportunity for change. Change can happen simply through conversations that can spark understanding of the food system and ideas for what needs to be improved. Just like this project has done by conducting in-person interviews and hearing what people have to say. Through these interviews we found out what improvements the volunteers and customers wanted to see such as more culturally diverse foods, expanding the market and more advertising of the FHM. This is just the beginning for the promotion of food security on the UBC campus and hopefully through our project we are closer to achieving it.

Food insecurity has become a significant global health issue in recent years, especially among post-secondary students (Clarke et. al., 2019). In fact, 37% of University of British Columbia (UBC) undergraduate respondents reported food insecurity, and students who have financial constraints, such as being unemployed or low-income and international students who are not eligible for Canadian financial support, are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity (UBC Wellbeing Annual Report, 2020). Although this represents a decrease compared to the percentage of students that reported food insecurity in 2017 (45%), this number (17,538 out of 47,400 undergraduates) remains highly significant when taking into account the considerable size of the student population at UBC's Vancouver campus (Clarke et al., 2019; The University of British Columbia, n.d). To address this issue, UBC has implemented various actions and services with the assistance of Food Security Initiatives (FSI). One such initiative is the UBC Food Hub Market (FHM), which offers at-cost groceries to students to increase access to affordable food, and aims to create a welcoming community space and promote social connections between UBC students and the UBC community (Vennto, 2022; UBC Food Hub Market, 2023). However, the UBC Food Hub Market has only been operational for nearly two years, and its effectiveness in how it has met its objective has not been determined. Therefore, to bridge this gap and evaluate the FHM's efficacy, social accountability, and identify opportunities for improvement, this project will apply the social audit method, which is “a tool that evaluates an organization's social and ethical performance, helps bridge the gap between aspirations and reality, and assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization” (Jain & Polman, 2003).

This research aims to conduct a social audit of the UBC FHM to assess whether it has achieved its objectives in enhancing food security knowledge, promoting social connections and building a welcoming community space for its stakeholders, which includes mainly UBC students. In order to assess the market's social impact on UBC students, the study solicits qualitative feedback from customers who have participated in market events and from those who have simply shopped there. The ultimate objective is to offer suggestions that will help the FHM to achieve its objectives.

The research objectives are to review existing literature to design and define the practice of a social audit of the UBC FHM. We will conduct a qualitative survey to evaluate the market's effectiveness in promoting food literacy and enhancing food accessibility. As well as review secondary data provided by UBC FHM stakeholders to assess performance in enhancing food accessibility, by analyzing findings from the social audit to assess the efficacy of initiatives to promote food literacy and accessibility. We will suggest practical recommendations for enhancing food literacy in the UBC FHM that can be applied to other relevant departments to address food insecurity among students.

To conduct a social audit, this project will follow a community-based action research (CBAR) methodology, which seeks to understand how challenges manifest in the UBC community and how its community members, especially students experience them. The social audit will incorporate both primary and secondary data collection methods. For primary data collection, a qualitative semi-structured survey will be conducted among volunteers and users of the UBC FHM. For secondary data collection, data reviews will be conducted. The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes related to food security initiatives, promoting cultural diversity, and community engagement.

The findings reveal that the FHM successfully provides at-cost groceries to students, enhancing accessibility and contributing to a reduction in food insecurity. Additionally, the FHM creates a welcoming space that fosters a better understanding of food insecurity within the community. However, there is potential for growth and improvement in the FHM's operations and impact. Short-term recommendations include designing a poster/banner to inform first-time visitors about the FHM and its goals, and continuing collaborations with campus organizations to increase visibility. Long-term recommendations involve exploring additional promotion strategies, establishing an online database for consumers to check inventory, and expanding the product range by collaborating with local food providers. Future research should investigate the determinants of food security knowledge for new students at UBC and examine the long-term effects of food security initiatives on and beyond the UBC campus. This information will help formulate better approaches to addressing food security issues and prepare organizations to support newcomers to campus, creating a more inclusive environment.

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Figure 1: UBC FHM Environmental



Observation, 2023

Figure 2: In-person survey poster, 2023



Figure 3: Identified sub-codes for each of three main theme codes which are developed from FHM’s objectives

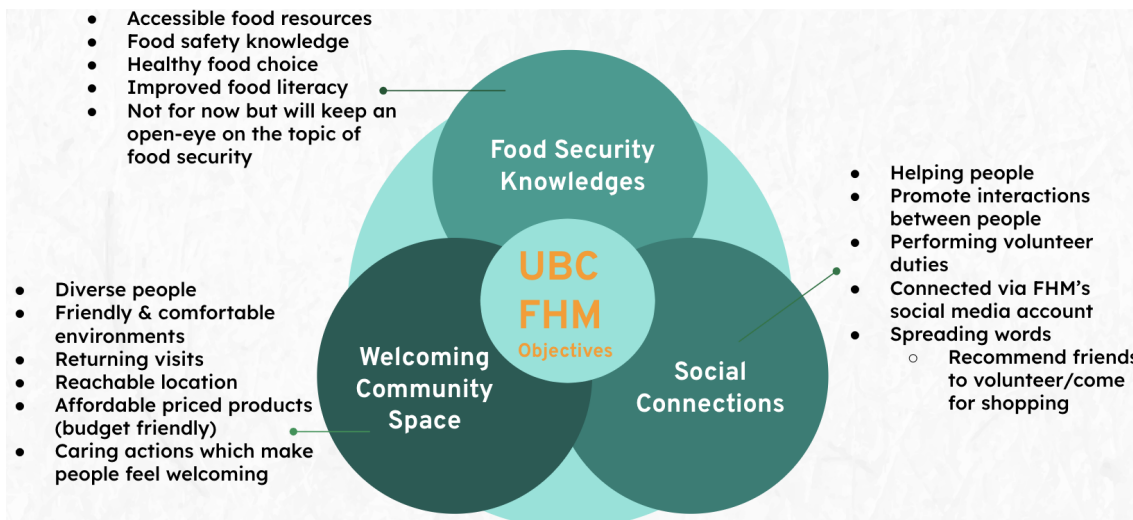


Figure 4: This bar chart displays the overall proportion of volunteers and customers of the FHM who agree that the FHM has successfully achieved its objectives. The chart provides a visual comparison of the stakeholders' perceptions regarding the accomplishment of the FHM's goals.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- **UBC** — the University of British Columbia
- **FHM** — Food Hub Market
- **FSI** — Food Security Initiatives
- **CBAR** — Community-based Action Research



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC

This project was an opportunity to speak with those who shopped and worked at the UBC FHM to get a better insight of what they like about the space and what improvements should be made. This was done through the means of a social audit which in the context of our project meant conducting in-person surveys. The definition of a social audit was an ongoing issue throughout the workings of this project since it has many meanings because it depends on the context of the field and organization it entails. However, by figuring out the workings of the FHM and knowing what their goals were as a community space, a clear definition was obtained and executed. This in turn helps the FHM in the future if they want to conduct another social audit and an opportunity for them to alter it as things change.

In regards to primary and secondary data it was noticed that in past years, there have been social groups and surveys conducted that surrounded the customers of the FHM, but no data on the experience of the volunteers. This gap in previous research was addressed and fixed by involving the input of the volunteers of the FHM, since they play a vital role. This was an opportunity for the FHM to compare their previous data with our new in order to see what changes can be made to the space.

### 1.2 RESEARCH RELEVANCE

Since we will be conducting a social audit on the UBC FHM, our research will implement food security initiatives through the increase of food literacy in the UBC community. Food security is an extremely critical issue that is facing the UBC community. Just last semester, students voiced their demands for more affordable food options on campus as a result of the price increases. Given that many students rely solely on options on campus for food and proper nutrition, our project with the FHM will benefit them directly. Not to mention, the level of food security within a certain population is an appropriate barometer for the overall health status of the community.

Our research will gather information that supplements the information already provided by our clients by clearly outlining the connections between the FHM community levels, which include the managers, volunteers, and customers. Food security has been a growing issue in the city of Vancouver, in fact, Canada's Food Price Report forecasts a five to seven percent increase in food prices this year, with the average family of four spending up to \$16,288 on food, up \$1,066 from 2022 (Vancouver Sun, 2023). Food banks have reported more and more visitors every year, and Provincial social assistance is the main source of income for nearly 50 % of food bank clients (Vancouver Sun, 2023). By conducting our research on the FHM visitors and volunteers, it will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of food insecurity and therefore be addressed better.

In terms of campus activities at UBC, our research will have important implications in helping improve access to affordable foods. By supporting the current efforts of promoting healthier and more affordable food options and providing valuable insights into the food preferences of UBC residents, allowing the market to expand its food offering and diversify its product range to cater to the needs of the UBC community.

Conducting a social audit of this promising pilot is an opportunity to identify ways in which the FHM can contribute even further to UBC's goals of achieving a sustainable food system. Additionally, the findings of this audit will help identify specific needs within the UBC FHM. For example, by working with UBC Food services members and volunteers such as those volunteering at the UBC FHM, our research will help them receive better training by identifying the barriers they might face and hence enhance their performance.

### 1.3 PROJECT CONTEXT

The FHM started off as a pilot project and where it stands today shows the hardwork and effort put forth to promote food security. The project that we have worked on was necessary in order to make improvements to the FHM, in which feedback from the consumers was required. The FHM already provides many benefits and has a set of goals such as promoting food security, at-cost groceries, promoting a welcoming space and social connection. However, we spoke to those who shop or volunteer at the FHM to know what is going well and what needed improvement. To speak with the community in person and to hear what they have to say is very powerful and a great opportunity to hear the changes they want to see. In turn, this gave us and the FHM opportunities to go forth with said improvements.

## 1.4 PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### **Purpose:**

Perform a social audit on the UBC FHM to determine whether it has met its objectives in promoting food security by creating a welcoming community space and supporting students' social connections within the UBC community.

### **Goals:**

To reflect the perspectives of the stakeholders on the UBC FHM and evaluate the efficacy of the UBC FHM in achieving its objectives. Then develop feasible recommendations to help the FHM thrive.

### **Objectives:**

- Perform a literature search in order to define and design a social audit method that is suited for the UBC FHM.
- Collect stakeholders' feedback on the UBC FHM and analyze their responses to evaluate the efficacy of UBC FHM.
- Develop recommendations to tackle FHM's objectives by the responses collected in order to improve the efficacy of the FHM.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

### 2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our research was guided by Community-Based Action Research (CBAR) methodology which states that "Community-based action research that seeks to do more than "solve" an arbitrarily determined problem or simply "add to the literature" on a given issue. Rather, it seeks to understand from a ground-level-up perspective how issues manifest in communities, how they are understood, and how community members experience them" (Guillion & Tilton, 2020, p.22) This collaborative approach was applied in our research through the Look-Think-Act framework. Specifically, we will apply the Look-Think-Act routine through the following 4 stages of our research: 1) we planned out what will be accomplished through our project 2) followed by brainstorming and analyzing data conducted and collected. 3) we compiled our results and 4) implemented our plan. We

incorporated CBAR principles of community participation by actively seeking out the involvement of stakeholders through surveying volunteers of the UBC FHM as well as its surrounding community. CBAR intends for cultural diversity, and through our research we were able to get a better understanding of the communities' wants and needs of the UBC Food Hub Market, while working alongside our clients to stock the market with culturally diverse food that will aid in food security for the UBC community. The social audit has empowered the stakeholders involved with the UBC Food Hub Market to continue progressing and providing the community with at-cost groceries and necessities for years to come.

## 2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Our research incorporated both primary and secondary data for our research methods. For primary data, we will conduct an in-person qualitative survey for the 55 volunteers of the UBC FHM and users of the FHM space. Our goal for the in-person survey was to obtain feedback from multiple consumers of the UBC FHM in order to better understand their needs and what improvements are to be made to the FHM. Our survey sample was selected through a convenience sample due to proximity to the UBC FHM. We worked closely with the UBC FHM coordinators and began conducting the in-person surveys on three separate occasions in order to get a more diverse sample.

Our secondary data is composed of secondary data reviews. To understand how the UBC community felt about the UBC FHM prior to our research, we analyzed data conducted by past student researchers in the form of focus groups and surveys. Based on the information gathered, we were able to identify gaps in their research in which there were no prior questions regarding the volunteers and how they were impacted by the FHM initiatives and goals. We were able to implement new questions to be analyzed through our in-person survey.

### 2.2.1 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH METHODS

Secondary data collection research methods included secondary data reviews. In order to understand the context and scope of our project, we reviewed focus group and survey data conducted by previous members of the FHM. Secondary data was obtained by our client and we reviewed the "FHM Evaluation Data." The questions in the focus groups and surveys related to "food security" amongst the customers of the FHM.

## 2.2.2 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH METHODS

Our primary data collection methods included a qualitative in-person survey of the users and volunteers of the FHM. The survey questions were semi-structured, and the guiding questions helped initiate a more conversational approach between the respondents. We conducted our survey on 3 separate occasions in order to get more varied responses depending on the time and day we went. On one of the days we attended an event hosted by the FHM in partnership with the Climate Café at UBC, and we set up our table with our poster and treats in the form of Blue Chip cookies to give to the people who completed our surveys. For every person that completed the survey, their email was taken so that they could be entered to win a \$25 UBC gift card. The in-person survey consisted of 35 total responses, with 11 volunteers (out of a total of 55) and 24 customers. This represents approximately 20% of the target population of volunteers and a small fraction of the approximately 300 customers per day during the winter session.

The environmental observation was done in the duration of one day. We took pictures of the market and observed how the community interacted with the space. This allowed us to get a better feel for the space and see where improvements can be made. It also served as a visual audit of the market that can be used as a tool in future social audits of the FHM.



Figure 1: UBC FHM Environmental Observation, 2023



Figure2: In-person survey poster, 2023

### 2.3 Methods of Administration

We contacted the customers of the market by approaching them through a convenience sample of whoever was in the market at the time. They were attracted by our free treats and were inclined to participate. We collected our data on 3 separate occasions: March 22, 2023, March 23, 2023, and March 27, 2023. Our data was collected in the FHM space and we had a table set up to survey the users of the FHM. Our rationale for using in-person surveys instead of another interface was because we wanted semi-structured questions that could be asked in a more conversational manner, allowing the respondents to communicate freely. With their consent, we recorded the audio of our conversations and transcribed the audio to text using Otter AI. We then conducted a thematic analysis of the data we received using the NVIVO program's coding tool.

## 3. RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the social audit of the UBC Food Hub Market (FHM), including primary and secondary data, which were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the UBC FHM's impact. Moreover, a higher percentage of volunteer responses was collected intentionally since the secondary data only focused on customer feedback, leaving a research gap by not collecting volunteer responses. Therefore

the primary data collection also aimed to bridge the research gap by collecting more volunteer responses, as they are also a significant stakeholder group for UBC FHM.

In this research, we developed three main topic codes extracted from FHM’s objectives in order to analyze stakeholders’ experiences with the UBC FHM and determine the efficacy of the FHM. The three main theme codes include whether the UBC FHM helped its stakeholders to 1) obtain more food security knowledge, 2) promote social connections within the UBC community, and 3) engage in feelings of a welcoming community space. More details of the coding relationship are mentioned in Figure 3:

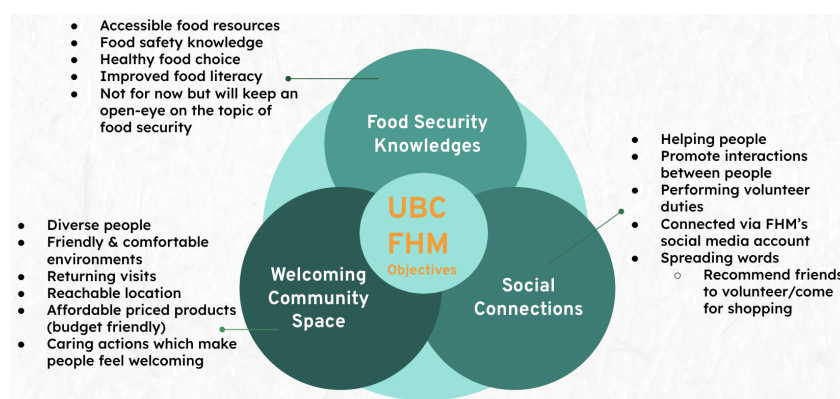


Figure 3: identified sub-codes for each of the three main theme codes which are developed from FHM’s objectives

Two additional theme codes encompassing the takeaways of volunteers and improvement suggestions from both stakeholder groups, which the improvement suggestions will be elaborated upon in the discussion and recommendation sections.

### 3.1 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION — IN-PERSON SURVEY

The primary data sample consisted of 35 total responses, with 11 volunteers (out of a total of 55) and 24 customers. This represents approximately 20% of the target population of volunteers and a small fraction of the approximately 300 customers per day during the 2023 winter session.

#### 3.1.1 VOLUNTEERS AND CUSTOMERS’ RESPONSES ON THE OBJECTIVES OF UBC FHM

As shown in Figure 4 and Tables 1 and 2 of Appendix 2, in the responses collected from volunteers, 35% (4 out of 11) indicated that their experience at UBC FHM improved their food security knowledge. Among these



respondents, one mentioned obtaining basic food-safe knowledge (e.g. food storage), while four reported gaining more resources on accessible and healthy food. The remaining six volunteers did not feel they had learned about food security but stated they would be more mindful of the topic. Among customer responses, 65% (16 out of 24) reported that UBC FHM improved their food security knowledge. Sixteen responses mentioned obtaining more information on accessible and healthy food, with ten specifically mentioning that they improved their food literacy by checking the shared recipes. However, eight respondents did not feel their food security knowledge had improved but would be more mindful of the topic.

All volunteer responses mentioned feeling connected with others in the UBC community. All respondents had engaged in small talk with other volunteers and customers and would recommend UBC FHM to others. Six of the responses specifically mentioned that they enjoyed helping people during their shifts.

In the customer responses, nearly 90% (21 out of 24) felt connected with others in the UBC community. This included feeling connected through interactions with other people at the FHM and following its social media accounts for more information on food security. However, two respondents felt the market lacked connection due to rushed shopping, and one customer felt less connected because the tables outside the FHM were not fully utilized for discussions or communication purposes.

All volunteer respondents mentioned that they perceived UBC FHM as a welcoming community space, with seven responses highlighting the diversity of volunteers and visitors, including undergraduate students, graduate students, professors, family members of UBC staff, and so on. Respondents also cited the low prices of groceries, the friendly and relaxing environment, and that their student director was especially caring about them.

In the customer responses, all respondents mentioned feeling that UBC FHM was a welcoming community space, which was largely due to the affordable prices which encouraged returning customers. Sixteen responses also mentioned the convenience of the market's location, as it was nearby their homes or classes. Furthermore, thirteen customers mentioned the friendly, nice, and comfortable environment, which made them feel secure during their visits.



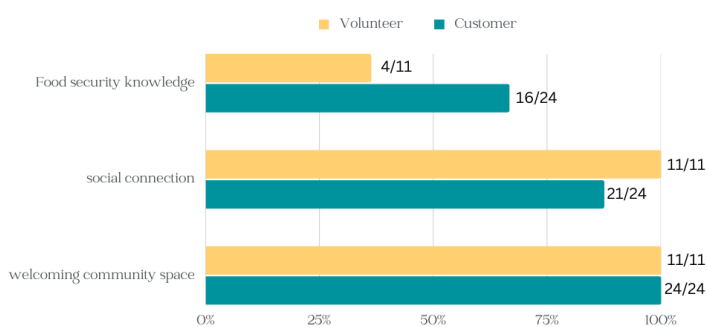


Figure 4: Overall response proportion between volunteers and customers of FHM who think the organization has met its goals

### 3.1.2 VOLUNTEER TAKEAWAYS FROM THEIR EXPERIENCES AT THE FHM

In our interviews with volunteers at the UBC Food Hub Market (FHM), we posed the question, "What is your most significant takeaway from volunteering at the FHM?" As illustrated in Table 1 of Appendix 2, their responses highlighted in several key aspects include:

- **Gaining experience in running a grocery store, encompassing customer service and product stocking:** Volunteers acquired hands-on skills and knowledge related to managing a grocery store. For instance, one volunteer (V1) shared, "Ensure you help people and provide them with a good experience in every aspect."
- **Drawing inspiration from the FHM and the desire to contribute to a meaningful cause:** Volunteers felt inspired by their experiences at the FHM and the tangible impact on the community. One volunteer (V6) explained, "It's truly meaningful to witness tangible action, which inspires me to implement similar programs and provides numerous ideas and inspiration for moving forward."
- **Assisting and supporting people while enhancing their lives:** Volunteers derived satisfaction from offering help and improving the lives of others. As one volunteer (V4) expressed, "Volunteering here is truly rewarding. It feels good, and you go home happy after genuinely helping people."
- **Personal enrichment through making positive impacts:** Volunteers experienced a sense of personal growth and enrichment from their participation in the FHM. One volunteer (V8) remarked, "You can make a significant impact on other people's lives by providing even a small amount of service."

These volunteer responses emphasize the various ways their experience at the FHM has contributed to their personal and professional development and their motivation to continue making a positive impact on food

security and community well-being. The quotes offer a window into the personal stories and insights of the volunteers, demonstrating the value and importance of their involvement in the FHM.

## 3.2 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

The secondary data comprises customer feedback from focus groups and internal ongoing surveys conducted by UBC FHM in the school year 2022-2023. This data is further divided into long surveys (18 responses), short surveys (58 responses), and focus groups (2 groups).

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### 3.2.1 CUSTOMERS' RESPONSES ON THE OBJECTIVES OF UBC FHM

Secondary data from focus groups, long surveys (18 responses), and short surveys (58 responses) suggested that customers experienced increased food security due to the affordable food options available at UBC FHM. Customers acknowledged that the FHM served as an excellent resource for accommodating student budgets, promoting healthier meals, more informed food choices, and home cooking instead of opting for takeout. It also demonstrated that social connections were formed through food hub events, engaging Instagram stories, and word-of-mouth referrals. Customers primarily discovered the FHM via social media and personal recommendations.

Furthermore, secondary data indicated that customers viewed the UBC FHM as a welcoming community space. Past focus group data revealed that some customers considered the store's location somewhat concealed and recommended using signage to enhance visibility. It appears that this suggestion was implemented, as primary data respondents mentioned noticing the signs and subsequently visiting the store. Customers also expressed a desire to expand the store's size, establish more operating locations, and continue frequenting the FHM. Overall, the FHM was characterized as an inclusive and inviting space with a warm and pleasant atmosphere.

## 3.3 COMPARISON BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA ON CUSTOMERS

Customers in the primary data reported being more aware of the price differences between FHM and other grocery stores at UBC when primary data on customers was compared to secondary data on customers. The idea of improved food literacy through shared recipes was also mentioned by respondents to the primary data, which was also a topic that was discussed in the focus groups for the secondary data. Both primary and secondary

data revealed that consumers were able to make more informed food decisions, were able to find resources that complied with their food budgets, and cooked at home more often than they ordered takeout.

According to the primary data, social connections were cultivated while customers were doing their regular shopping at FHM, in addition to receiving more information about food security and connecting through social media posts and stories. As well as by recommending FHM to friends and peers in order to help the FHM spread the word to make more people know about this place. On the other hand, secondary data highlighted social connections made through food hub events, interesting Instagram stories, and learning about FHM mostly through word-of-mouth and social media.

Both primary and secondary data identified how the UBC FHM provided a warm and welcoming community space. Respondents in the primary data started going into the store after spotting the signs, which indicated that FHM had taken into account customer feedback from earlier focus group data, where participants had recommended using signage to increase visibility. Customers from both data sets stated that they would return for shopping for more basic groceries and preferred a larger store with a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. Both data also mentioned the need for additional operating locations and the variety of cultural food products provided by FHM due to its welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The results revealed several key strengths and areas of improvement that are vital to understanding its impact on the stakeholders, particularly volunteers and customers. The findings from both primary and secondary data collection demonstrate how UBC FHM is successful in fostering a welcoming community space, encouraging social connections, and disseminating information about food security. In this section, we will go into more detail about these findings and relate them to the aims, objectives, and goals of the research as well as the relevant literature.

### 4.1 BUILDING A WELCOMING COMMUNITY SPACE

The ability of UBC FHM to establish a warm community environment is one of its main advantages. In the market setting, both volunteers and customers said they felt welcomed and relaxed. This feeling of belonging is facilitated by the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants, the reasonable costs on grocery products which

support visitors' budgets, and the convenient location (Citizenship and Immigration of Canada, 2010). These results are consistent with earlier research on welcoming communities, which emphasizes the value of accessibility, diversity, and inclusivity in fostering a sense of belonging and fulfillment among community members (WelcomeBC). Additionally, the findings show a connection between UBC FHM's welcoming atmosphere and returning customers. This suggests that creating a warm and inclusive environment encourages customers to return for more, which is advantageous for the market's sustainable operation and its objective of promoting food security on the UBC Vancouver campus. The outcome is consistent with the body of knowledge regarding the enhancement of customer satisfaction and loyalty through warm and welcoming public spaces (WelcomeBC).

#### 4.2 PROMOTING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Another important strength of the UBC FHM is its role in encouraging social ties between students and the university. Building a strong sense of community among stakeholders is facilitated by the helpful interactions between volunteers and patrons as well as by volunteers themselves. These results are consistent with the literature on the value of social connections in promoting a sense of community and wellbeing. In order to foster a sense of belonging and wellbeing among community members, the promotion of social connections is crucial (Wilkinson et al., 2019). The literature on social capital and community resilience, which emphasizes the value of creating strong networks and relationships to improve individual and collective well-being, is consistent with the FHM's success in promoting social connections (Wilkinson et al., 2019). The positive comments from volunteers and clients about their relationships with one another and the UBC community serve as evidence of the FHM's success in this regard.

#### 4.3 ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY KNOWLEDGE

By offering accessible and reasonably priced food options, educational resources, and learning opportunities through events and social media posts, the UBC FHM seeks to improve its stakeholders' knowledge of food security. Because the idea of community food hubs have become an increasingly popular way to address food insecurity among post-secondary students (Murphy et al., 2022). The findings from both primary and

secondary data demonstrate a notable advancement in volunteers' and customers' knowledge of food security. By sharing recipes, they increased food literacy, learned how to support their food budgets, and became more aware of price comparisons. The vast majority of customers claimed to be eating better meals and making wiser food decisions. However, there's still room for development in this area. Despite the fact that the FHM has made progress in raising awareness of food security issues, some stakeholders reported only a modest improvement. As a result of this finding, it is possible to take further steps to improve food literacy and increase stakeholder awareness of the problems associated with food security.

#### 4.4 IMPORTANCE AND MEANINGS OF THE RESEARCH

This research is important as it provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of the UBC FHM in achieving its goals related to food security knowledge, social connections, and the creation of a welcoming community space. The findings have implications for the ongoing development and improvement of the UBC FHM, as well as informing the broader field of community-based food initiatives. The study highlights the need to prioritize food literacy, social connections, and inclusivity in designing and implementing food security programs.

The present study advances our understanding of the problem and opportunity by providing a comprehensive assessment of the UBC FHM's impact on food security knowledge, social connections, and the creation of a welcoming community space. By incorporating both primary and secondary data, the research offers a robust and nuanced perspective on the experiences of volunteers and customers, contributing to the broader field of community-based food initiatives. The results underscore the importance of fostering food literacy, promoting social connections, and creating inclusive environments in addressing food insecurity and enhancing community well-being.

One unexpected finding from the study was the reported rushed shopping experiences of some customers, which may have limited their opportunities for social connections and engagement with the UBC FHM community. This finding suggests that further efforts may be needed to create a more relaxed shopping environment and encourage interpersonal interactions among customers. Another unexpected finding was the relatively small proportion of consumers who said they did not feel like their knowledge of food security had improved, despite the majority of respondents indicating an increased awareness and focus on food security. This

indicates that even though the UBC FHM is successful in increasing public awareness of food security issues, there may be room for improvement in terms of providing more focused educational materials and resources to further improve customers' knowledge of food security.

#### 4.5 LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to the data collected in this study. First, the primary data collection method relied on self-reported responses from volunteers and customers, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability bias (Althubaiti, 2016). Additionally, the sample size for both the primary and secondary data was relatively small, especially in the case of customers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, due to time constraints, the study primarily focused on the experiences of volunteers and customers, the two major groups of UBC FHM's stakeholders. It did not include the perspectives of other important stakeholders, such as the UBC FHM staff, management, or partnering organizations, which could provide additional insights into the impact and effectiveness of the food hub and contribute to the overall decision-making process.

Another limitation is the potential for selection bias in the primary data collection, as participants who chose to respond to the surveys and interviews may have been more likely to hold positive views about the UBC FHM. This may have skewed the results towards a more favorable portrayal of the food hub's impact on food security knowledge, social connections, and the welcoming community space. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for the examination of changes in the experiences of volunteers and customers over time.

The study also faces the challenge of unifying the concepts of food security, as people have different levels of understanding on food security. It is difficult to ensure that all respondents are on the same page, which may affect the interpretation of results. To address this issue, future studies should provide clear definitions and explanations of food security concepts to ensure a more accurate assessment of the participant's knowledge and experiences.

Lastly, as the UBC FHM has only been fully operational for two years and has grown rapidly in the post-COVID context, it will likely serve more UBC students as they return to campus for classes. Therefore, it is

important to conduct regular social audits to ensure that the food hub's efficacy is on the right track. Social audits encourage local democracy, which promotes collective decision-making and community participation while benefiting and empowering underserved populations (Fazal et al., 2022). Conducting regular social audits can help the UBC FHM monitor and evaluate its impact and effectiveness in addressing food security, fostering social connections, and creating a welcoming community space for its stakeholders.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

#### Short Term

1. Design a poster/ banner that includes a brief description of the UBC Food Hub Market to first- time visitors

Based on our interview responses with the customers, we think the Food Hub Market would better achieve its goal of providing at cost groceries in a more successful manner if there was information at the location that described what exactly the Food Hub Market is. We interviewed individuals who were first time visitors to the Food Hub Market , yet they didn't know what it was; we had to inform them that it was in fact a student-led initiative that aimed to sell food to customers at the “at cost” price. From having these conversations, is why we think that it would be extremely effective if the Food Hub Market considered incorporating a poster into their space that includes the following:

- What is an at cost grocery store
- When did the FHM start operating
- The reason behind creating the FHM
- The team behind the FHM
- How you (the customer) shopping here actually helps

2. Continue collaborations with campus organizations

The other major issue we received in our data collection period was that not enough people knew about the existence of the FHM. Unfortunately, it's location isn't in a central area of campus such as “The Nest” or The Bookstore where there is a significantly greater amount of foot traffic. Due to its location on campus, we didn't find any customers who just happened to be in the area so they decided to enter, everyone was coming solely for

the purpose of shopping there. So, in an effort to inform more people about the Food Hub Market, we think it would be an effective strategy to continue ongoing collaborations with any campus organizations, as well as exploring the potential of creating new ones. Hosting events with student-led organizations such as the LFS Undergraduate Society would be extremely beneficial as it would increase the visibility of the FHM on campus and throughout the UBC community. Other potential organizations to consider collaborating with in the future are:

- Sciences Undergraduate Society
- UBC Sprouts (volunteer- run natural food co-op providing food to the local community at an affordable price)
- UBC Recreation
- AMS Sustainability
- CLIMATE HUB

### **Long Term**

#### 1. Consider more Promotion Strategies

Based on the data we collected and analyzed, we found that many people weren't aware of the presence of the Food Hub Market, and only became aware of it after they saw it on social media. This is why we recommend that the FHM allocate a person such as a volunteer, who is responsible for promoting the UBC FHM on different social media platforms. This is important since most businesses and customers are turning to social media to learn about new opportunities and look for communities that are in line with their own. Hence, the FHM should utilize social media more since the majority of customers learned about it through online platforms.

#### 2. Online database for consumers to check inventory

The significance of having an online platform for all businesses and organizations, especially smaller scale ones such as the FHM has to do with the increase in reliance on technology of most people. Especially after the COVID - 19 pandemic, it is clear that having a digital space for businesses is necessary to allow it to continue running its operations. Our recommendation is that the FHM has its own website where customers can check the inventory available, and could potentially purchase it in advance.



### 3. Expand the product range by collaborating with local food providers

Our results showed that although customers were satisfied with the product range offered at the FHM, most of them reported that it was quite limited. To further clarify this, customers reported that they would often come and not find the items that they considered to be an essential part of their diet such as plain yogurt. Other customers reported that they were hoping to find a wider variety of items that encompassed more ethnically diverse foods. Considering the way the FHM operates, we are aware that it is often difficult to procure items to sell from local distributors at an “at-cost grocery store”. We think it would be an effective approach to try to collaborate with local distributors that are aiming to promote their new products. This would allow them to receive beneficial feedback while also benefiting the UBC FHM.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One major issue that we uncovered during our research is the limited knowledge people had with regard to food security. We asked both volunteers and customers if they felt their level of knowledge on the said topic changed since they arrived at the UBC campus, and whether or not the presence of the FHM as a student-led initiative contributed in any way to their approach to food security and their knowledge. Our results, as discussed above, were interesting as they suggested that most individuals within the context of the UBC community had little prior knowledge before beginning their journey as a student on campus, let alone being involved in any campus organizations with ties to combating food security, which is the case with the volunteers at the Food Hub Market, as seen in the secondary findings.

One of our most significant findings when it comes to food security knowledge is that almost the entire sample that was interviewed reported that their knowledge on food security increased significantly after arriving at the UBC campus, and even more so after visiting the Food Hub Market. This is why we recommend that a literature study be conducted on the determinants of food security knowledge for new students at UBC. This study could be carried out on several pools of participants; the first being the students who live in campus residence and are involved in the meal plan provided by UBC Residence Association. The second group would be first year students who commute to UBC, and the third group would encompass individuals who are postgraduate students or transfer students from exchange programs. The information gathered from this study would help

formulate better approaches to addressing food insecurity issues on campus. One feasible approach is to provide sufficient information surrounding food security by using a brochure or flyers that can be disseminated by the UBC FHM. The purpose of this approach is to make sure individuals would have an adequate level of understanding of the concept of food security when they arrive at the UBC campus. Hence, creating a more supportive campus environment in order to address food insecurity among UBC students.

Another area for future research would be to investigate the long-term effect that the food security initiatives on campus have beyond the scope of the UBC campus. This would be an interesting area of knowledge to tap into as it would reveal whether or not the efforts put into improving food security on campus have ripple effects that are seen outside of the context of the UBC community.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Food Hub Market is one of the many efforts made by the UBC campus community, and specifically the FSI (Food Security Initiative), which falls under the UBC Wellbeing Strategic Framework, in order to improve the state of food security on campus. The UBC Food Hub Market aims to provide the community with groceries sold at the price which they were ordered. The UBC Food Hub Market also aims to create a space for students in which they feel welcomed, safe, and are able to meet and interact with like-minded people from a welcoming community.

The term “social audit” is quite an ambiguous term, as there are no clear guidelines that outline what a social audit, specifically of this scope, actually is. This posed the main challenge in this project, as the clients did not know what to expect when it came to the deliverables from this social audit, considering the nature of our project.

In the context of this project, the social audit is meant to help determine whether the store is fulfilling its intended purpose of providing affordable groceries to students and members of the UBC campus, and whether it is able to provide a welcoming space for them as well. The goal is to provide transparency and accountability for the UBC Food Hub Market’s operations and impact, and promote greater social responsibility and community engagement. Therefore, this social audit included conducting in-person interviews at the location of the Food Hub Market.

After gathering our primary and secondary data through semi-structured surveys of the customers at the Food Hub Market and the volunteers at the location, we proceeded to analyze the data by comparing the different answers given to us by the volunteers to those given by the customers. We then compared those answers with the Food Hub Market's goals to evaluate whether or not the FHM was achieving its intended purpose. We followed a community-based action research for this purpose, as it allows us to understand how challenges manifest in the UBC community and how they are reflected in student understanding of food security.

After carrying out our research, we found that the FHM goals of providing at-cost groceries to students in an effort to reduce food insecurity were achieved, as customers reported increased accessibility of groceries through the FHM. Our findings also showed that the FHM was providing a welcoming space that only provided groceries, but fostered a greater sense of understanding of food insecurity within the community. Based on those results, we provided a course of action through a list of recommendations and areas of future research that should be explored in order to increase the efficacy of the FHM and improve the overall state of food security on the UBC campus.

In conclusion, the UBC Food Hub Market has proven to be successful in achieving its intended goals of providing affordable groceries and creating a welcoming community space for students. Through our social audit, we have provided recommendations for short-term and long-term actions that can further enhance the FHM's impact, including designing a poster, continuing collaborations with campus organizations, considering more promotion strategies, creating an online database for customers, and expanding product range through collaboration with local food providers. Additionally, we recommend areas for future research, including studying determinants of food security knowledge among new UBC students and investigating the long-term effects of food security initiatives on and beyond the UBC campus. Overall, the UBC Food Hub Market has great potential to improve the state of food security on campus, and we hope that our recommendations and future research will thrive on its continued success.

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## APPENDIX A: SURVEY TEMPLATES

**Questions for volunteers:**

- Which major are you in?
- How long have you been volunteering here?
- What would be the reason you chose to volunteer at UBC FHM?
- Have you observed any social connection between students and the community, any examples?
- What do you enjoy the most about volunteering in the FHM?
- Have you made connections to the UBC community through this role? Why or why not?
- Will you recommend your friends to volunteer at the FHM? Why or why not?
- What is your biggest takeaway from volunteering at UBC FHM?
- Any improvements you want to see made at the FHM to achieve its objective of promoting food security by building a welcoming community space and supporting students' social connections with the UBC community?

**Questions for FHM Customers:**

- From before you come to campus and before discovering the FHM, how prepared did you feel about your food security knowledge? How do you feel now after knowing and coming to the FHM?
- Before you came and discovered the FHM, on a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your food insecurity knowledge level, and why?
- How would you rate your food insecurity knowledge level now? and Why is your rating the same/changing?
- How did you hear about the FHM?
- What do you enjoy most about the FHM?
- Do you feel connected more with the UBC Community by shopping at FHM? Why or why not?
- Any Food knowledge you learned from today? (ex. Learning new simple recipes)
- Anything about the FHM you think can be improved?
- Would you recommend your friends to come and shop/join the event at FHM? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX B: SUMMARY TABLES ON CODING THE PRIMARY DATA

Table 1: LFS450 FHM Volunteer responses

Code Name	Description (based on the FHM objectives)	Files (11 in total)
<b>Food Security Knowledge</b>	Main Theme code	10
Accessible and Affordable food	Eg. And after I volunteer here, I know that we can actually buy food in such a low price.	4
Learn new knowledge about food	Ask the participants if they feel that they have learned something new about food security.	1
healthy food choice	Make healthy food orders with their budget on food.	3
Not for now but will be more mindful of the topic	The participants will be more aware of food security (eg. learn more, do more research, and keep their eye-opened).	6

Code Name	Description (based on the FHM objectives)	Files (11 in total)
of Food Security		
<b>Social Connections</b>	Main Theme code	11
Help people	Build connections by helping customers by answering their questions/requests.	6
performing volunteer duties	Participants do their volunteer jobs based on the role descriptions (eg. cashier, cleaning up in the last shift of the day)	5
promote interactions between people	Participants interact with more people, including other volunteers, UBC staffs, customers, by chatting, making friends, etc. eg. "Being around (in the FHM) you can see people talking and chatting. (V11)	11
Spreading words	Improving connections by recommending their friends to come and volunteer in UBC FHM, and helping the FHM spread the word to make more people know this place.	11
<b>Welcoming Community Space</b>	Main Theme code	11
Caring actions	Actions that respondents felt they are cared (eg. Caring staffs, thoughtful facility such as bag exchange)	7
Diverse people	All races, ages, social positions. Eg. All kinds of people, all kinds of volunteers.	7
Friendly and relax environment	Friendly people within the space, makes the respondents feel warmly welcomed.	11
Affordable price (support budget)	The product price is at-cost, which support the students budgets on access to basic groceries.	5
Reachable location	The location of FHM is close to student's dorm/classroom, so it's easy to walk in to the store.	2
Returning customers	Customers would love to return to the FHM for more shopping experience.	7
<b>Improvement Suggestions</b>	Main Theme code	10
Expanding store size	Eg. Have another location opened in campus	4
More product selections	Increase the product types	7
others	Eg. Improve the volunteer training, especially on the shelf life. Promote the marketing, make more people know about the FHM.	2
<b>Takeaways</b>	Main Theme code	8
experience in operating stores	Gained work experience on how to run a grocery store. Eg. Good customer service, product stocking, cleaning up, closing shift, etc.	2
Helping Supporting People	Make sure you have help people and provide them a good	4

Code Name	Description (based on the FHM objectives)	Files (11 in total)
	<p>experience and everything. (V1)</p> <p>There is much of impacts you can make in helping other people's lives just by providing a small amount of service. (V8)</p> <p>I think that is volunteering here is just rewarding. It feels good. And you just go home happy (after you actually help people). (V4)</p> <p>I'd say like, little acts of kindness and a smile can help make someone's day a little bit better support (V7).</p>	
Inspired by FHM and wish to make a difference	<p>Make a difference to build UBC in a better place:</p> <p>Sample scripts:</p> <p>I think it's really meaningful to see tangible action and it inspires me to want to implement similar programs and gives me a lot of ideas and inspiration for going forward. (V6)</p> <p>You see how much of an impact you can make in other people's lives just by providing a small amount of service and I think that's just like main takeaway. (V8)</p> <p>How important food security is to people on campus? There are a lot of people that come by and it's up to you. It's just good to have a space where you're actually able to afford the food you're going to eat. (V10)</p>	3

Table 2: LFS450 FHM Customer responses

Code Name	Description (based on the objectives of the UBC FHM)	Files (24 in total)
<b>Food Security Knowledge</b>	Main Theme Code	17
Accessible and affordable food resources	<p>By shopping at the FHM, respondents received more information about where to access affordable food on UBC Vancouver campus.</p> <p>Eg.: "Now I know where to get affordable and healthy food, not just some junk food." (C10)</p>	10
Learned new knowledge about food	See in volunteer responses	0
healthy food choice	Make healthy food orders with their budget on food.	4

improved food literacy	Learned from the shared recipes provided by the FHM	10
Not sure but will be more mindful on the topic of FS	The participants not sure whether they have gained more knowledge, but they will be more mindful on the topic.	2
<b>Social Connections</b>	Main Theme Code	22
Help & support other people	Building connections with others by helping/ supporting actions (eg. Received help from volunteers, make their friend feel better by supporting them and buying them coffee or tea at the FHM)	6
lack the use of the outer space for promoting discussions	“You have tables and chairs here. If there's some kind of like, I don't know. Some discussion that can go on in these spaces.” (C13)	1
performing volunteer duties	See in volunteer responses	0
promote interactions between people	<p>Respondents feel obtained positive interactions with others during their time at the FHM.</p> <p>Eg.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I feel a lot more connected, because I'm more exposed to like these events that happen around campus that are nice.” (C17)</li> <li>- “Yeah, I definitely feel to make more connections. I have made friends with one of the volunteers here.” (C20)</li> </ul>	13
Social media	<p>Respondents feel connected with UBC community by following, reading, and replying FHM’s social media accounts.</p> <p>Eg. :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I’ve learned many things by following their instagram accounts and other UBC insta accounts.” (C21)</li> </ul>	8
Spreading words	Recommend their friends to come and shop in UBC FHM, and helping the FHM spread the word to make more people know this place.	21



<b>Welcoming Community Space</b>	Main Theme Code	24
Caring actions	Actions that respondents felt they are cared by the staffs of UBC FHM. Eg.: “I would say be able to get a small quantity of things. It was really nice like when it is packed in small portions because I can only finish this small amount before it expired.” (C20)	5
Diverse people	Every individual is welcomed in the FHM, this make the respondents feel included. Eg: “I actually found everyone in my class shop at the FHM” (C11)	4
Friendly and comfortable environment	Friendly people within the space, makes the respondents feel warmly welcomed. Eg: “People here are always so friendly.”(C10)	13
Affordable price (support budget)	The product price is at-cost, which support the students budgets on access to basic groceries.	20
reachable location	The location of FHM is close to student’s dorm/classroom, so it’s easy to walk in to the store.	16
Returning customers	Customers would love to return to the FHM for more shopping experience.	5
<b>Improvement Suggestions</b>	Main Theme Code	20
Better marketing		2
Expanding store size	Respondents would like to see a larger store size, or another FHM in campus. Eg: “It would be nice to see other food hub market inside of other buildings.”(C16)	2
More product selections	Increase the product types	15
Others	- “Sometimes I feel like maybe the volunteers might be a little overwhelmed when businesses busy so if the university could support there being more infrastructure for more volunteers” (C12)	1

Table 3: Customer's self-rating feedback on their food security knowledge

Summary table of Customer self-rating on Food security knowledge				
#	Before	After	Increased or no change	Explanations / reasons (quote included)
1	2	3.5	increased	Get more information about resource on how and where to get more accessible food.
2	2.5	3	increased	Increased a little bit by raising awareness in food security. "I actually learned more about what food security actually is. So, before I don't really know it"
3	0	0	No change	Didn't get a chance to learn from FHM: "I've only been once in a rush to get a coffee."
4	3	3	No change	"I don't think being a customer here has given me more knowledge of it. It's just giving more support of getting cheaper food at better prices."
5	2	2	No change	"I've come to just get groceries but I I'm not sure that I've really learned anything."
6	2	3	increased	" just seeing the variation of prices at different places like just seeing how much of a difference there is in the prices over there versus what you'd seen a chain grocery store."
7	2	3	increased	Learning more about food security by following the Instagram account of FHM.

8	3	4	increased	"I think just knowing what resources are available to me."
9	1-2	4.5	increased	This participant has done many research on food security and discovered many food security initiatives in UBC campus.
1	3	4	increased	"Now I know where to get affordable and healthy food, not just some junk food."
1	1	2	increased	"I learned a bit more (by shopping at FHM)"
1	1	2	increased	"it's keeping catching my eyes and I'm more aware of it."
1	1	1	No change	"I don't feel I have known more (about food security)."
1	-	-	increased	"I would say to see the prices that are here versus elsewhere, you kind of are starting to notice more of like, oh, how much are they like jacking things up based on which to which like things just getting a better bearing on what a good deal is."
1	2	2	No change	"I volunteered at the Vancouver food bank. So like I am aware of some things but in general, like I don't know a lot and luckily myself, I never had to experience food insecurity. So I don't understand it in that way there. (didn't intend to learn more)"
1	-	-	No change	"I never really looked into it when I was sitting on campus or during COVID."

				Yeah, it was pretty much my whole university.”
1	0	2-3	increased	Learning more about food security by following the Instagram account of FHM.
1	1	3-4	increased	The participant mentioned that she has better understanding of the food security.
1	0	3.5	increased	“I have learned a lot by classes I took and club events.”
2	4	4	No change	“ Many concepts about food security I already knew before.”
2	2	4	increased	“ I’ve learned many things by following their instagram accounts and other UBC insta accounts.”
2	3	4	increased	“Just for having visibility and stuff of food security.”
2	3	3	No change	“I'd say it's still kind of at the same point. I haven't learn anything new yet.”
2	2	3	increased	Considerably improved by learning new recipes.