

Food Insecurity and Dietary Requirements

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Prepared for VP Student Life Talia Dixon



Overview

The 2019 UASU annual survey incorporated the Health Canada HFSSM Adult Scale, the authoritative food insecurity measurement tool. While the 2019 survey report explored food insecurity across many demographics and factors, it did not cross-tabulate food insecurity with dietary requirements. This briefing aims to fill that gap.

In the Fall 2019 survey dataset of ~3900 UAlberta undergraduate students, we find that food insecurity is strongly correlated with a wide variety of dietary requirements. Virtually any dietary requirement increases food insecurity rates from ~30% to ~40-45%. Several groups of students were especially likely to experience severe food insecurity if they had at least one dietary requirement: Indigenous students, gender minorities and LGBTQ2S+ students, neurodiverse students, first-generation students, and students from Education and Campus Saint-Jean.

Based on the number of affected students, there is likely an unmet, food-security-linked demand for affordable vegan, gluten-free, and halal options.

Food Insecurity Measurement

The standardized HFSSM Adult Scale, which we included in the 2019 annual survey, asks whether respondents sometimes or frequently had the following ten experiences:

- I worried food would run out before I got money to buy more.
- The food I bought didn't last and there wasn't any money to get more.
- I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
- I cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.
- I cut the size of meals or skipped meals in 3 or more months because there was not enough money for food.
- I ate less than I felt I should because there was not enough money for food.
- I was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.
- I lost weight because there was not enough money for food.
- I did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.
- I did not eat for a whole day in 3 or more months because there was not enough money for food.

By Health Canada standards, zero affirmative responses is considered food secure, one affirmative response is considered marginal food insecurity, two to five affirmative responses means moderate food insecurity, and six or more means severe food

insecurity. Our survey analysis has focused on moderate and severe food insecurity. According to Statistics Canada, 6% of Albertans are moderately food insecure and another 3% are severely food insecure.

Within our sample (n=3944), 12.4% of respondents qualified as severely food insecure, and another 19.2% qualified as moderately food insecure. This is consistent with other post-secondary student food insecurity data across Canada, and radically higher than the general population. For breakdowns across equity-seeking groups and demographics, see pages 12 and 13 of the [2019 survey report](#).

Dietary Needs and Food Insecurity

Later in the survey, the same group of students answered a separate question on dietary needs and preferences. This question was designed to support UASU business operations. We compiled responses to this question and cross-tabulated them with the food insecurity data. We found that most dietary restrictions (including voluntary, cultural, and medically necessary restrictions) go hand in hand with substantially higher food insecurity.

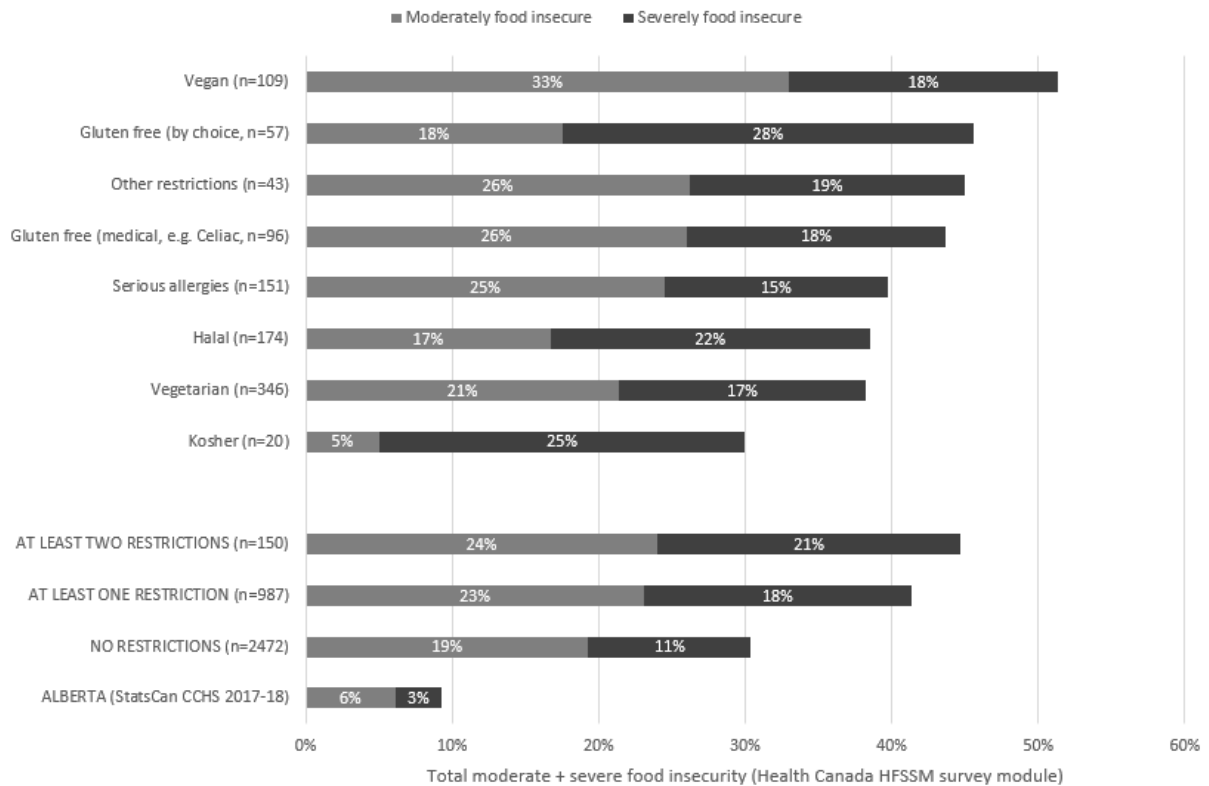
9% of Albertans experience moderate or severe food insecurity, and so do 30% of UAlberta undergraduates without dietary restrictions. For students with at least one dietary restriction, that rate rises to 41%. Vegan and gluten-free students are especially likely (52% and 44-46%, respectively) to experience moderate and severe food insecurity.

We estimate the following numbers of UAlberta undergraduate students have special dietary requirements:

- Vegan: 880
- Vegetarian: 2800
- Halal: 1400
- Kosher: 160
- Gluten free (by choice): 460
- Gluten free (medical, e.g. Celiac): 780
- Serious allergies: 1200
- Other: 350

Affordable vegan options on campus could make an impact on food insecurity while appealing to roughly one out of nine students. The same is true for gluten-free options (1 out of 27 students) and halal food (1 out of 23 students). These dietary restrictions are closely linked with substantially increased risk of serious food insecurity.

UAlberta undergraduate food insecurity rates by dietary restrictions (Fall 2019, n=3944)



Intersections and Equity

Looking specifically at the fraction of students who had at least one dietary restriction, their rate of severe food insecurity (18.2%) rose when cross-tabulating for various equity-seeking groups and other groups at risk.

- Non-binary or other gender, with dietary restriction(s) (n=24): 37.5% severe food insecurity
- First Nations, with dietary restriction(s) (n=13): 38.5% severe food insecurity
- Métis, with dietary restriction(s) (n=26): 30.8% severe food insecurity
- Self-identified neurodiverse with dietary restriction(s) (n=173): 30.1% severe food insecurity
- LGBTQ2S+ with dietary restriction(s) (n=186): 24.7% severe food insecurity
- First-generation students with dietary restriction(s) (n=319): 25.7% severe food insecurity
- Education students with dietary restriction(s) (n=101): 23.8% severe food insecurity
- Campus Saint-Jean students with dietary restriction(s) (n=28): 25% severe food insecurity