

Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance

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What?

The Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance (MAFRA) is a collaboration between community and university partners to support participatory, action-oriented research, education and outreach on food justice issues across Manitoba. Food justice is achieved by promoting community food security, food sovereignty, and local food systems.

Our research is collaborative and involves the active and meaningful input and participation of community members and academics to create social change and promote social, environmental and food justice. Community members and partnering organizations have a full and equal voice in all stages of our activities.

Why?

Across Manitoba, people face challenges to their food systems:

- 110,000 Manitobans are food insecure (Health Canada, 2004)
- 52% of Manitobans are overweight or obese (Gov. of MB, 2004)
- 75% of people living in isolated northern communities are food insecure (Thompson, 2009)
- 2,017 fewer farms existed in Manitoba in 2006 than in 2001 (MAFRI, 2006)

In light of these issues, many are developing alternative food systems that provide local, fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate, fairly produced and affordable food (food security). Many want to increase control over food systems and to play an active role in providing their own food (food sovereignty). Alternative food systems can take many different forms such as direct marketing or community supported agriculture farms, community kitchens and gardens, and traditional hunting, trapping, or fishing. All of these solutions are an important part of a more just food system in Manitoba.

Where?

Urban, rural, and northern Manitoba all face distinct challenges in achieving food justice. It's the people in these regions that have the best understanding of these challenges and potential solutions. This is especially true for Indigenous Peoples who have suffered centuries of colonization and oppression. MAFRA affirms the unique character of these regions, and the many cultures reflected in each, by enabling each region to decide what projects and research will be funded in their communities. We are also connecting communities among these regions, and indeed in other provinces and countries, by creating opportunities for networking, shared support and collaboration.

Who?

MAFRA includes over 50 community partners from across Manitoba, along with researchers from the University of Manitoba, Brandon University, the University College of the North, and other universities across western Canada. Our membership includes organizations that promote education, community development, neighbourhood renewal, community health, activism and social change, cultural traditions, and local and export oriented agriculture. But this is not a "closed shop", any organization, community, or individual concerned about food justice is welcome to join!

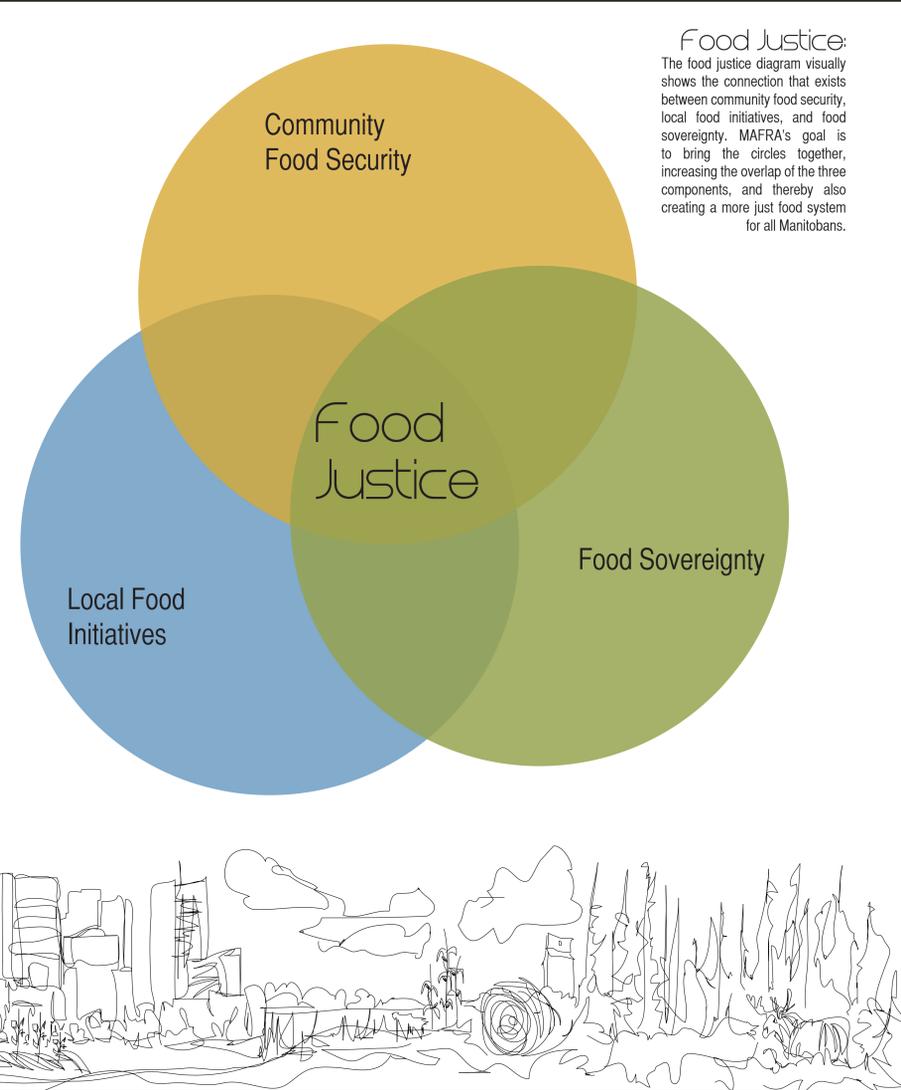
How?

MAFRA hopes to:

- Identify and address food-related needs and priorities
- Facilitate new and enable existing initiatives
- Support networking and the exchange of ideas, knowledge and products
- Explore how these outcomes benefit other low population density regions, especially as they relate to vulnerable groups.

MAFRA is supporting:

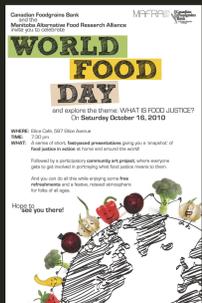
- Community projects
- Student research
- Conferences and gatherings
- Communications such as video, podcasting, blogging, Facebook, newsletters and radio



Food Justice:
The food justice diagram visually shows the connection that exists between community food security, local food initiatives, and food sovereignty. MAFRA's goal is to bring the circles together, increasing the overlap of the three components, and thereby also creating a more just food system for all Manitobans.

Celebrating Food

World Food Day:
• An annual event bringing together a diverse group of people to celebrate good food while learning from one another, about food justice.



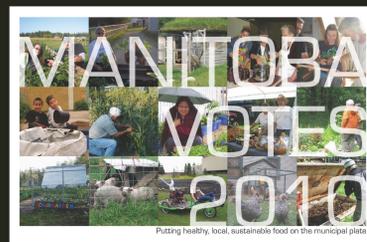
• These events have featured live music, free food from around the world, skills workshops, a community art project and more!

Growing Local Conference:
• Participate in Manitoba's largest food security conference hosted by Food Matters Manitoba.
• MAFRA supports sessions on topics including northern and Indigenous fisheries, food policy, refining communication tools such as video, photography, and websites, and building urban-rural connections.

Brown Bag Lunch Series:
• Brings together university students and community members to share research and ideas about food justice.
• Provides an opportunity for a wide diversity of people to meet and learn from each other.

Creating Change

Manitoba Votes 2010:
• This non-partisan election guide encourages citizens to talk about food with their municipal candidates in the 2010 election.
• It features information about why food is important, sample questions to ask candidates, and ideas for municipal food policies.
• MAFRA is also actively involved in the Winnipeg Food Policy Working Group, a group of individuals and organizations working to promote food policies in Winnipeg.



Knowledge Exchanges:
• MAFRA has participated in and facilitated events to share skills with interested community organizations. These include workshops of writing funding proposals, participatory video evaluation, and the new social media (eg. facebook, twitter, blogging, podcasts). Community learning, whereby community partners play an active role in designing and leading research and education, is key to knowledge exchange in and outside the classroom.

Sharing our Findings

LocalandJust.ca:
• Home to a blog on food justice issues, videos on food in Manitoba, information about MAFRA and our partners, and a community events calendar.

Videos:
• We use video to document and share community events, and profile organizations working on food issues in Manitoba.
• MAFRA engages communities through participatory video projects and explores video as an evaluation tool.



Newsletter:
• Our newsletter features community stories, MAFRA updates, research findings, upcoming events, and profiles of the people involved with MAFRA.
• The newsletter uses accessible language and images to share knowledge and stories with a wide diversity of community partners across the province.

References:

Government of Manitoba, *Manitoba's Comparative Health Indicator Report*, (2004).
Health Canada, *Canadian Community Health Survey, Cycle 2.2 Nutrition* (2004).
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Thompson, Shirley, *Growing Hope in Northern Manitoba's Aboriginal Communities*, (2009).

Photo Credits:

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