Food Security: Supporting Roots in Eleuthera
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Advisors: Katlin Tilly and Jacob Nelson

Introduction

Food security is a very complex issue consisting of three main aspects: accessibility, access, and utilization. Accessibility is the presence of ample nutritious foods in a given area. Access refers to peoples’ ability to get to that food easily. Factors that may limit accessibility are lack of money, lack of transportation, and other socioeconomic factors. Utilization is what happens to the food after it is accessed and obtained. Is it used in a healthy way or an unhealthy way? One factor that may limit optimal utilization is lack of education about nutrition and healthy cooking.

One group that is both particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and particularly relevant to The Island School is SIDS, or Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean and Pacific as defined by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. They are vulnerable because many of them are more dependent on tourism than agriculture. They are also islands, which means they are very dependent on shipped imports. And finally, they are remote, which means that even once the food gets into the country by boat, distribution is made difficult by the seclusion.

For this research, food security at The Island School was measured as the quantity of food obtained within the Bahamas. Sourcing local food is not an easy task. The Bahamas struggles with very inconsistent rain fall which limits crop production. Poor soil quality also restricts the amount of farming possible in many areas. There are also social limitations. According to our interviews, there is a common trend in young people not seeing farming as a future career. All of these limitations have an impact on how food secure the Bahamas is, as well as The Island School.

Despite these challenges, the goal of this research was to make a plan for The Island School to become 50% food secure by 2025.

Methods

We split our methods into internal and external because the nature of our project required communicating with the Island School kitchen as well as reaching out to local farmers and organizations.

Internal Methods

Internal methods included interviewing the Island School kitchen staff to collaborate on possible changes to our food purchasing and taking a closer look at kitchen receipts. A previous semester’s research group compiled all of the 2016 kitchen receipts into a Food Audit and we were able to use this data to compare food security from 2016 to 2019 from January to March.

External Methods – Farmers

Working with farmers meant visiting North Eleuthera because the soil there is richer and more fertile. There is a higher concentration of farming there. We discussed with farmers what foods we could source from them specifically, and got the general feel for what farming on Eleuthera is like. We made connections with farms farther away by phone call.

External Methods – Organizations

We visited the Bahamas Agricultural and Industrial Corporation, which works with farmers to increase government owned land. We hope to represent The Island School in the South Eleuthera Farmers’ Association and attend meetings to stay up to date on what is happening in the Eleuthera farming community.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Katlin Tilly and Jacob Nelson, our research advisors. Cam Rugase for coordinating research class this semester, the Communications department for coming along on our adventures and photographing them, Jacquel Kemp and then entire kitchen staff for teaching us what it takes to feed this community every day, and all of the incredible local farmers that we interviewed and will continue to work with. Thank you!

Results

There are big changes between The Island School’s food security in 2019 and our 2025 food security projections. Increases in the categories such as drink, fruit, and eggs are very noticeable, and there are no decreases in food security in any categories. A few categories are predicted to be 100% food secure in 2025. An in-depth explanation of how these predictions were set is in the discussion section of this paper. Looking to the future, we have developed a full step by step plan and document with all of the logistics and specifics for The Island School to follow to become 56% food secure over the next 5 years.

Current Island School Food Security and Future Projections

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Discussion

External Methods – Farmers

By 2025 The Island School aims to be 50% food secure for other proteins. We will replace all imported turkey with local chicken from Abaco Big Bird. campus production of tilapia and mushrooms will also be increased.

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For the 2025 projections, we will divide these by category to show what changes we will make. These projections are made for the following categories:

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These projections are based on the assumption that all local farms will increase production to meet the demands of The Island School.

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