

Making the Case for a Food Security Alliance in Baja California Sur (BCS)

Definition: According to the USDA, food insecurity is a situation of limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods (or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways).

Baja California Sur (BCS) was found to be 18 of 32 states in Mexico in the number of households categorized as “food insecure”, according to the National Health and Nutrition Survey (National Institute of Public Health - INSP, 2012).

In October 2013, several organizations formed a working group to research the state of food insecurity in BCS. Their findings have evolved into an interest in forming a Southern Baja Food Security Alliance (SBFSA), whose primary mission is to:

- 1.- Help create a strong and vibrant local alliance of social, governmental and business organizations whose activities improve food security within the region.
- 2.-To investigate possible strategies to provide healthy

and fresh food to low-income and at-risk families in the urban and rural communities of Baja California Sur.

In November 2013, the working group convened an assessment survey of 600 families in Baja California Sur’s at-risk communities, a statistically-relevant percentage (3%). The survey’s questions and evaluation criteria were based on the standard of living indicators of the U.N. Multidimensional Poverty Index along with the three pillars for food secu-

rity outlined by the W.H.O. – food availability, food access and food use.

Additionally, the working group identified 40 key stakeholders to interview from each major sector including farmers, distributors, educators, government agencies and civil society organizations to determine the current status of various initiatives that could reinforce or hinder food security in BCS.



Collecting information to the community. Mayra Gutiérrez, 2014.

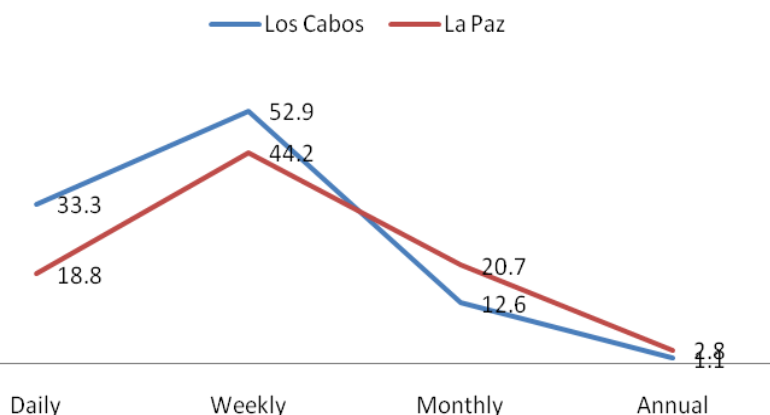
The Face of Food Insecurity

Results from the SBFSA Regional Food Security Survey Initiative

Community surveys conducted in the municipalities La Paz & Los Cabos with at-risk populations revealed a reality that calls for urgent action. 70% of respondents claim that quality food is available; but 44-52% of the same respondents reported that, on a weekly basis, their families lack financial access to this food or that the food they consume is not sufficient (Graph 1). Food assistance programs exist within a limited number of BCS’s food insecure communities, but the assistance they provide has not been suffi-

cient—65-70% of the at-risk population report that they do not receive support from an assistance program.

Graph 1. Respondants who report insufficient food availability (%/Frequency)



Baja California Sur Regional Food Security Statistics

Income: All municipalities surveyed reported having residents that earn less than \$500 pesos, per month (or 25% of Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) figures for 2014 at \$2,052pesos per month).

Food intake: 45-52% of residents surveyed report that the food they consume is not enough and that they are in a state of hunger. According to nutritional standards, average food intake is nutritionally-unbalanced (Table 1).

Health: Lack of fresh

healthy food is compounded by an increase in malnutrition-related diseases—12-23% of respondents have been diagnosed with diabetes,

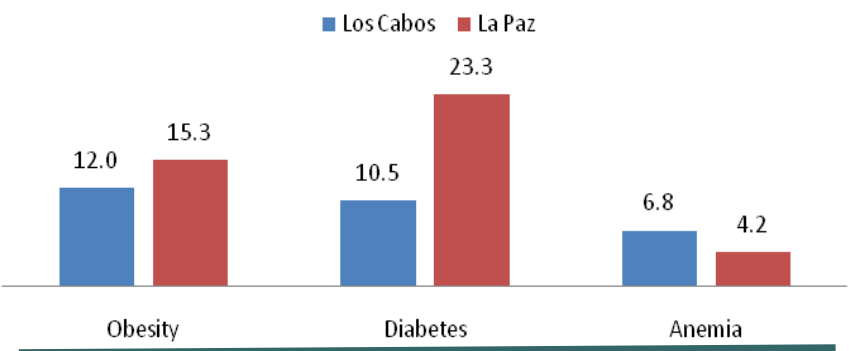
while 15-23% are classified as obese; these are problems that have been shown to stem from a diet lacking in fresh, healthy foods (Graph 2).

Table 1: No. of Portions Consumed Per Food Group Per Person (Daily)

Municipality	Protein	Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Pastas	Dairy	Sugar	Fast Food
La Paz	2.6	4.7	3.8	2.7	2.6	3.7	3.8	1.5
Los Cabos	1.8	4.2	4	3.3	2.5	3.9	3.7	1.1
Standard Food Pyramid	2-3	4	5	5	2	2-4	Moderate	N/A

With in those foods available, both communities reported their highest rate of daily consumption in grains; additionally, individuals surveyed in Los Cabos & La Paz reported vegetables as their second highest food consumed.
<http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/>;
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/am401s/am401s03.pdf>;
<http://www.nutricioncomunitaria.org/>,
<http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/fruit/es/>

Graph 2. Rate of Incidence of Nutrition-Related Diseases by Municipality



A Regional Food Systems Perspective

Opinions and Perspectives from the Public, Private and Nonprofit Sectors

When asked what the current strengths and weaknesses of the regional food system were, stakeholders from each of these sectors aided greatly in painting a more distinct picture of the daily consumption choices of the social majority:

Food Availability vs. Food Accessibility:

Good quality food products are available in local markets but it is eco-

nomically-inaccessible to the majority. 24% of stakeholders interviewed report that elevated food prices are the principal barrier to food access. 19% feel that the at-risk community does not have the buying power to access fresh foods.

Social Support Programs - Inadequate Coverage:

Existing social programs are not enough; a large

number of residents are not covered. 65-70% of the at-risk population report that they do not receive support from an assistance program.

Regional Food Culture:

The distinct regional food choices among Baja California Sur residents is what perpetuates a number of social problems and diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, anemia, obesity, etc. Nutritional intake is characterized by extremes of lack or excess, each fostering its own health issues. At one end, we find over-consumption of processed food items high in fat and sugar; while at the other, we find a diet prescribed by economic disparity, nutritionally-incomplete and calorically-insufficient.

Underdeveloped Agricultural Sector:

Physical: The sector lacks the infrastructure necessary to cool, store and distribute its produce on a local scale.

Social: The sector lacks a direct link with the local consumer base (on a household and business level).

Educational: The sector lacks the training necessary to develop pro-

duction plans adequate to local market needs and develop marketing strategies for increased local consumption.

Regional Import/Export Economy:

Food consumption in BCS is focused on imported commodities; in turn, BCS agricultural production is heavily slanted toward exportation.



Tierra Libertad & Ballena Hot Meals Program, Cynthia Wickerink, 2014

A Path To Recovery

An Emergent Strategy for the Alleviation of Food Insecurity in BCS

The SBFSA vision is to establish a network of community stakeholders providing educational and programmatic services to those in the southern Baja community seeking to access, produce and prepare their own fresh food.

Several non-profits have sprung up to respond to the call, but they are working at a neighborhood scale at this point. With limited resources, these organizations attempt to satisfy the immediate need for food in targeted areas of each munici-

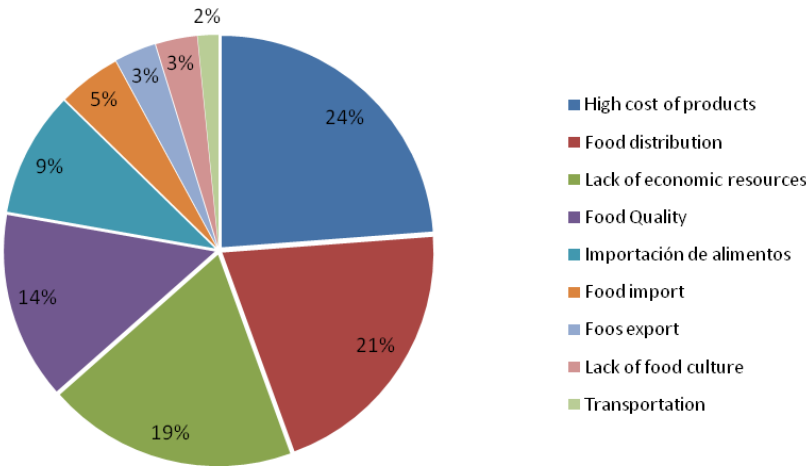
pality through hot meals programs, ensuring that children get a few complete meals a week; others offer food vouchers redeemable at local grocery stores; while others are laying the foundation for a longer-term vision that seeks to reinforce self-sufficiency emphasizing home-scale food production (Graph 3).

All are needed, but a more coordinated approach might allow efforts to be more replicable. The SBFSA hopes to stimulate and reinforce collaborations between or-

ganizations and projects already in action in order to take one step further, beyond immediate food provision and toward long-term food security.

From our observations during this study, it has become clear that the current first line of support to these at-risk communities is the food kitchens that are developing throughout the area, some of which receive governmental support, including the program Sin Hambre (through SEDESOL), and religious affiliations. These are the projects that are working to meet the immediate need for food within at-risk communities.

Graph 3: Stakeholder perception regarding causes of regional food insecurity



These grassroots kitchens have expressed a need that an Alliance can meet – they are looking to increase fresh food consumption through on-site production gardens and nutritional education & counseling. The Alliance is the ideal platform from which these kitchens can connect with local organizations working within other sectors of the food system to improve food security outcomes. There are two organizations in La Paz and Pescadero that are actively engaging with the community to promote home-scale production gardens, nutritional counseling, and training services; these represent ideal partners for a food kitchen development initiative. If the financial resources can be located, expanding their programming would be the ideal first step for an Alliance.

Through collaborations like the above, initiatives that speak to longer-term food security have a greater likelihood of success. Below are

several ideas that were highlighted during our stakeholder surveys:

Food Rescue Initiatives:

Harvest what gets left behind! Establish a program to make use of second-quality export produce through a gleaning or food rescue program that salvages the considerable percentage of locally-produced food that is left to rot or disposed of because it fails to meet export standard.

Strengthening the Home Garden Tradition:

Develop nutritional awareness programs for both adult and youth populations to encourage a diet that is diverse, fresh and local. Provide training to strengthen the "vegetable garden at home" tradition and emphasize water recycling. Offer training on how to harvest, access and prepare fresh foods to address

health problems related to diseases found in the community.

Season Extension & Food Storage Technologies:

Support the establishment of agricultural infrastructure needed to successfully achieve an extended growing season as well as increased storage capacity for local producers in order to increase the availability of locally-produced fresh foods.

The Southern Baja Food Security Alliance is a nascent effort to bring quality food to people who suffer from food insecurity. If the next stage is formalized, the partnership could represent one of the largest and most inclusive food security projects for BCS and provide the social platform to help improve the quality of life of the community in a sustainable and far-reaching way.



Tierra Libertad & Ballena Hot Meals Program, Cynthia Wickerink, 2014

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