

**Introductory Speaking Notes for
Nellie Cournoyea, Chairperson,
Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board**

INAN Committee on Food Security in the North

February 25, 2021

DRAFT

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would also like to thank the Committee for the invitation to participate in these important discussions on Food Security in Northern Communities.

As Chairperson of the Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, and as a lifelong Arctic resident, I have seen the issue of food security from a number of sides.

My involvement with the Advisory Board goes back to April 2011, when the program was first established to replace the former Food Mail program.

As this Committee knows well, the objective of Nutrition North Canada's retail subsidy is to help make nutritious food more accessible and more affordable than it otherwise would be, to residents of 116 isolated Northern communities that lack year-round access from roads, rail, or water.

Nutrition North has proven to be successful in meeting its mandated objective, and I can confirm that most Northerners appreciate that this subsidy improves access and lowers the prices of nutritious foods. I can also confirm that it does not make life in the North affordable.

Nutrition North Canada wasn't established to solve food security on its own, although it is often seen as the face of the federal government's food security response.

In preparing for today's session, I've reviewed the transcripts from previous presenters. An important message shared to this Committee is that addressing food security is a shared responsibility. The challenges we're facing in our communities are very complex, and require shared commitments that help build local capacity.

Still, I'm happy to report that Nutrition North's work with Northern and community partners is continuing to produce important results. Among these are:

1. That the amount of food being shipped to isolated communities continues to increase. The volume of subsidized nutritious and essential items shipped to Nutrition North communities went from 20 million kilograms in 2011, to roughly 32 million kilograms in 2019-2020.

During this time, Nutrition North has also helped to keep the rate of inflation on nutritious foods in its 116 eligible communities well below the national average.

2. The Recently launched Harvesters Support Grant is an important milestone for the Nutrition North program. Early signs from the Indigenous partners that co-developed this initiative is that it is good. This model is working, and it has significant potential to expand further.

This past April, the Government of Canada was able to inject an additional \$25M in to Nutrition North Canada to address the added challenges being faced in isolated northern communities. This injection was put towards increased subsidy rates to further reduce costs of store bought foods.

Though not part of the one-time injection of \$25M, the program also expanded the list of subsidized foods and essential items.

New items like hand sanitizer, cleaning and personal hygiene products are being now subsidized in all 116 Nutrition North communities.

Circumstances over the past year have led to unprecedented use of the Nutrition North Canada subsidy program.

And while this COVID-19 response has helped, I would caution that new norms have been established, and dependence and capacity issues in our communities will continue throughout the spring.

Support is always welcome, especially when it's done in consultation with the people it is intended to help.

In conclusion

Many Northerners living in isolated communities need to budget for high costs of living while living on a fixed income. Nutrition North Canada is part of this solution, and I know that the program is committed to providing additional supports through a whole-of-government approach. It will be important that this includes working with Provinces, Territories, Indigenous leadership, and – most importantly – our own communities.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to Food Security in Northern communities. Until broader issues such as, income levels and local community capacity are resolved, we will have food insecurity in the North.

There are common factors influencing food security in our communities. There are also unique needs in each region and each community. In all cases, our local leaders and community members are the best resources for implementing future solutions.