

Food Security

Mr. Speaker, March is Nutrition Month and I would like everyone to join me in celebrating. It is a time to highlight the importance of accessing and eating healthy food. The theme this year is Good for You, Dieticians help you find your healthy.

Dieticians support individuals to reach their nutrition goals both to prevent poor health and to improve their overall health. I am encouraging residents to find their healthy by talking to dieticians if they have access to one. There are other sources of good dietary information including traditional harvesters, and healthy food experts in their communities who may be able to offer support and guidance in making wholesome food choices to live a healthy life. Nutritious eating looks different for everyone; our culture and traditions are an important part of what we eat and how we eat.

Mr. Speaker, I can not talk about Nutrition Month without talking about food insecurity. It is a major issue in the NWT. High transportation costs, rising food prices, along with changing environmental conditions that affect wildlife harvesting are compounding this issue.

Food is a vital part of culture, well-being and health. Food security is essential to our ability to make healthy choices and live our best lives. Research consistently shows the link between wholesome food choices and healthy eating. Having access to affordable and nutritious food is a vital determinant in improving the health and wellbeing of our people and communities.

Mr. Speaker, addressing food insecurity is a priority for this government. We identified it in our mandate and have committed to increasing food security through

efforts to support locally produced, harvested, and affordable food. It is also a key priority in our Anti-Poverty Action Plan. We have taken a whole of government approach to this issue through the establishment of the food security interdepartmental working group to ensure collaboration to address this important issue.

Through our renewed Territorial Anti-Poverty Action Plan, Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan and the Agriculture Strategy, we have begun work to support residents in accessing local sources of fresh food and ensure future generations have the skills they need to feed their families.

We have taken action to improve food security by introducing new and enhanced programs to support harvesters and families going out on the land. A total of \$330,000 in funding was provided for regional harvesting, a training and mentorship program, a pilot program for trapper mentorship, and assisting families to go out on the land.

We continue to deliver the Small Scale Foods Program in each of the regions of the territory to assist in the non-commercial growing and production of food. This program helps underserved, remote communities and organizations operating within them, to get the resources they need to support and promote local agriculture.

We also offer funding to eligible organizations in their efforts to improve food security in their communities through a variety of programs.

Mr. Speaker, we know that addressing food security is a shared responsibility that requires a coordinated response from both the public and private sectors. It is important that we come together to identify priorities, challenges, and most importantly, solutions, to develop a path forward in our approach to improving food security.

In January, the Department of Health and Social Services hosted a virtual Anti-Poverty Round Table to continue this important work. Over 80 delegates from across the territory, representing Indigenous governments and organizations, community governments, non-governmental organizations and businesses, including local grocers and agricultural producers, discussed how to improve food security.

Experts from the NWT, British Columbia, northern Manitoba, and Nunavut shared their knowledge and experiences on harvesting and local food production, with the goal of providing long-term solutions to food insecurity that address underlying issues and empower people to provide for themselves. They talked about innovative projects that are leading the way in developing healthy food systems here in the North as well as across the country. Representatives from the GNWT also provided an overview of the GNWT work on improving food security.

Short panel discussions were followed by longer breakout sessions where delegates had an opportunity to discuss what they learned as well as share their thoughts and experiences. Delegates discussed how to build strong and sustainable systems so that hungry people had access to wholesome, affordable food. They talked about finding ways to include traditionally harvested food in local grocery stores and how to develop community specific, culturally-adapted harvesting strategies and practices to strive towards Indigenous food security.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Anti-Poverty Advisory Committee members for helping to plan the Round Table, all the presenters, and for sharing their experiences.

Thank you also to all the delegates who attended. I hope everyone left with a shared commitment to creating a sustainable, healthy food system for their communities and the territory. The GNWT is currently working on a report summarizing what

was discussed at the Round Table. I am looking forward to sharing the report with Members and making it available on the Anti-Poverty website later this year.

Mr. Speaker, we all have a role in addressing poverty in the NWT so that residents have access to supports they need to live in dignity, with access to the basics of food and shelter so they can be full participants in their families and communities. Our commitment to ensuring residents have access to nutritious, affordable food is a critical component in advancing our poverty reduction goals. This government will continue to actively collaborate with our partners to develop shared approaches and find innovative solutions so that we can move forward as an equitable and healthy territory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.