

Hunting for Food Security Strategies: Analyzing the Commercialization of Traditional Inuit Foods in Nunavut

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Montreal, Canada (traditional Kanien'kehá:ka territory), 2016

In Inuit communities in Nunavut, foods such as seal, caribou and Arctic char have traditionally been regarded as common resources to which every member of the community is entitled access. In recent times, a complex combination of colonial influences have marginalized the role of country foods and caused food insecurity in the territory to rise to alarming rates. In response to these trends, many Inuit have begun adopting strategies that commercialize country foods, or incorporate them into the monetary economy through cash-based exchange with other Inuit. This trend is the subject of many conflicting viewpoints, viewed by some Inuit as an adaptive strategy to make country foods more accessible and by others as fundamentally incompatible with their kinship-based systems of exchange. This project contributes to the growing dialogue surrounding the commercialization of Inuit country foods by providing 1) a comprehensive analysis of the academic and 'grey' literature on the subject and 2) a comparison of the prices of imported food items with the prices of country food exchanged through an online social media channel. I find that country food exchanged using social media is substantially cheaper than analogous imported food items. Using this, I argue that commercializing country food can serve as an adaptive strategy for Inuit to alleviate food insecurity if such initiatives remain 'made-in-Nunavut' and guided by Inuit ecological and kinship-based values.

