

DESERTED

The Impact of Food Deserts on Food Insecurity in Nova Scotia



WHAT IS A FOOD DESERT?

If you aren't aware of food deserts, let us give you a brief definition.

A food desert is a geographic area where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient travelling distance. Food deserts are a major contributor to food insecurity and often coincide with low-income areas.

LOGLINE

DESERTED is a documentary that uncovers the challenges of accessibility to everyday groceries faced by many rural and urban Nova Scotians.

FILM SYNOPSIS

DESERTED is a social conscious documentary that investigates the issue of food deserts in Nova Scotia, Canada. The film looks at how food deserts impact food insecurity in both urban and rural areas of the province. Taking a cross-cultural view, the film follows several Nova Scotians who live in both urban and rural food deserts and looks at their challenges and solutions.

The documentary looks at food deserts in several rural communities where the drive to get groceries can be anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. And many of the people living in these areas may not have cars. The rural communities don't have public transit, and while there may be some community transit options, those cost money. In some cases, residents carpool or ask neighbours to pick up grocery items for them.

Deserted also gives exposure to urban food deserts by telling the story of Woodside in Dartmouth, a densely populated part of Halifax Regional Municipality. Woodside had a Sobeys store that closed in 2009, leaving residents, many without vehicles, to travel a few kilometers to the next grocery store.

“When a supermarket pulls out of an area, it’s very difficult to attract new stores into that area, especially if the area is not wealthy.”

But there was more to that story in Woodside. Before Sobeys departed and sold the shopping plaza the company placed a 20-year restrictive covenant on the deed of sale that said no other purchaser of that space could sell food or medicine. This was, in the opinion of the director, Ian Wilson, “A decision that was driven by corporate greed. It was an assault on the people who live there.”

The arc of the film and its characters comes in the way ordinary people rise to meet the challenges.

One example of creating solutions is shown by Kathy Spearing, a resident of the rural Dean Settlement, runs a not-for-profit organization called *Barefoot Farmers*. On her patch of land, she and her partner grow all sorts of food. Through the organization, they help other families grow their food, too, supplying them with all the advice and tools they need. Those families can keep their produce, or Barefoot will purchase it to sell to other customers.



In another rural settlement, Upper Big Tracadie, where most of the residents have descended from black loyalists, local councillor, Mary Desmond took an old filing cabinet and transformed it into a community pantry. An artist friend painted the exterior of the cabinet in bright colours, and now it sits at the end of a lane, and is filled with food available for free for anyone who needs it. Now, the community has taken over, even adding solar lights so people can access the pantry at night. Desmond said, though, the pantry is just a “band-aid.”

Despite these solutions, the film points out that there isn't one single solution that will solve the problem. The documentary raises the question - how can a province, rich in farming and fishing not become more food autonomous and encourage small grocery stores or small outlets that sell healthy foods in rural areas?

“Somehow we have to get around to growing more, and not just four or five months of the year,” Wilson said. “What we found in this documentary is that where there are lower income areas, whether that’s a rural or an urban area, then there’s less likelihood to have easy access to real healthy, nutritious food.”

“Nobody should go hungry today. Nobody.”

Mary Desmond offers a thoughtful comment on the issue at the end of the film: “It’s not just one person’s responsibility; it’s everyone’s responsibility. Nobody should go hungry today. Nobody.”

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

This film is a product of the Lunenburg Doc Fest’s Seniors Workshop. And the topic of the film came about from a challenge - to make a documentary film about food security. We didn’t want to make another film about food banks. Food banks play a huge role in fighting against food insecurity but their media coverage is ubiquitous. We also set ourselves two parameters for the subject matter: to cover both rural and urban areas of Nova Scotia, and to be inclusive by ensuring that we talk with indigenous and black Nova



Scotians. Our pre-production research came across the serious issue of food deserts - areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient travelling distance. When we looked around we saw the truth – and the profound injustice – on prominent display all around us.

The title of the film, DESERTED, clearly has double meaning - the food desert is the obvious one. But we also wanted to express how many ordinary people have been abandoned or deserted by big corporate stores, the provincial government and the larger economic system.

While this appears to be a documentary looking only at the small province of Nova Scotia, DESERTED could have been made almost anywhere in North America. Every province has a food desert problem and almost every Canadian city has them too, with the exception being Montreal. American cities are rife with food deserts, especially in areas of lower incomes and marginalized communities.

My ultimate goal is that the release of DESERTED will spark public discussions about the hardships of living in a food desert and how they negatively impact people's overall health and quality of life, most especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

FILM TEAM

Tim Reeves-Horton - Producer and Editor



Tim started in film and television as a background extra in Toronto while studying screenwriting at George Brown College, Maruska Stankova's *Directing, Acting, Writing for Camera* course, *TIFF Screenwriting Mentorship Program*, among others. Tim won pitching opportunities four years in a row at the *Banff International Television Festival*, leading to documentary credits with *CBC Television* and the *National Geographic Channel*. Since moving home to Nova Scotia, Tim has worked on a wide range of client-driven and documentary projects as a partner in Picnic Studios.

Ian Wilson - Director, Narrator and Writer



Ian is a filmmaker, screenwriter and actor. In addition to directing and narrating the documentary, *Deserted*, which was nominated for *Best Documentary* in the *2022 Screen Nova Scotia Awards*. Ian has directed and written several documentary and short narrative films that have shown in film festivals around the world. Sponsored by Screen Nova Scotia, Ian recently completed a three-part advanced TV screenwriting program under ex-BBC Head of Drama, John Yorke. He can be seen acting in his recurring role in CBC's *Diggstown*.

Mary Wilson - Researcher, Writer and Story Editor



Mary is a former health educator who has shifted her focus to film production. In addition to being the story editor and co-writer of *DESERTED*, Mary has also worked on several narrative and documentary film and TV productions. Her off-screen credits include *Big Brother Canada*, *The Amazing Race Canada* and the docuseries, *Real Farm Lives*.

Other team members

Shirley Hardin - Writer and Researcher

John LaBella - Researcher

Kenda MacLellan - Researcher

Ron Stockermans - Researcher

Lauren Unsworth - Production Coordinator

FILM FUNDING

The film's production was funded by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program for the Lunenburg Doc Fest.

DIRECTOR'S FAQS

Why did you focus on food deserts instead of food insecurity in general?

We know that food insecurity is a serious issue across, not just Nova Scotia but in all of Canada. Food deserts are just a part of the whole food insecurity jigsaw. But they are often unknown or rarely talked about as part of the problem. Yet, they are there around us in our urban and rural environments.

How long did it take to make this film?

Because this documentary was sponsored by the Lunenburg Doc Fest, we had a very limited time period in which to create the film. The film had to be ready to show at the festival within four months. We started with a blank slate and a challenge to make a documentary about food security in some form. So, we had to narrow the subject matter focus, do the research, and find the appropriate characters, all before we went to camera.

What do you think was the most important part of creating a documentary like this?

I'm a writer. So, I may have a bias here. But fundamentally, a documentary must be story based. You should have interesting, authentic characters to tell their

story and we should see a story arc. Our story editor spent many long hours sifting through all the interviews to ensure that we had good tight stories.

How important was research in making this documentary?

Research makes your story content-rich. You have to put on your reporter hat and gather more facts than the obvious ones. We did this when we told the story about Sobeys pulling out of the Woodside area of Dartmouth. What makes a documentary great is when you uncover the gem that is buried deep, out of sight of your audience.

Is there anything that surprised you while making the documentary?

There were both unpleasant and pleasant surprises. When we met with the rural black Nova Scotian community leader we were shocked by how little their community had in supporting infrastructure. It's a community that has been forgotten by the municipal and provincial governments. But we were buoyed by the story of *Barefoot Farmers*, a not-for-profit group that helps rural people with a small bit of land to create their own self-sustaining micro-farms. Overall, we were disappointed how little is actually done to improve the food desert problem across the province.

What's next?

We are in pre-production of a gutsy, six-part television docu-series which takes the viewer on a thought-provoking journey to meet several very determined and resourceful Atlantic Canadians who are finding innovative ways to overcome their own personal and societal challenges. The stories are ready, the crew is in place but our big issue is securing the funding.

As any indie filmmaker will tell you, funding a project like this is a major challenge and, currently, we are seeking funding.

OWNERSHIP

Lunenburg Doc Fest.

FILM TRAILER

The trailer for DESERTED is available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/675031069>

CONTACT

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