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Retail store governance models in remote Indigenous communities across Canada: a media analysis

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Abstract

Background In remote Indigenous communities across Canada, food insecurity is shaped by systemic inequities rooted in colonial governance structures and compounded by geographic isolation, high operational costs, limited retail competition, and small population sizes. While these material challenges are well-documented, less attention has been given to the governance of retail food systems and the ownership models that mediate access, affordability, and community control. In contrast to Australia, where Indigenous retail governance has received growing academic focus, Canadian research in this area remains sparse—despite growing public discourse and recurring media coverage. Here, we survey news articles to (1) Describe retail food governance structures and their impacts (particularly on: ownership models, community engagement, food affordability, and food accessibility) in remote Indigenous communities, focusing on community perspectives, and (2) Develop a Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada.

Methods We conducted a systematic media analysis of news articles extracted from the Canadian Major Dailies database (via search string; $n = 148$) and Google News search (using 10 searches \times 4 pages/10 results; $n = 400$). Using a double screening process, we applied structured inclusion and exclusion criteria to select articles that addressed the current governance structures of retail stores in remote, Indigenous communities across Canada. We used a hybrid coding approach based on four main themes: (1) store ownership models; (2) community engagement; (3) food affordability; and (4) food accessibility. We purposefully extracted direct quotes from the news articles to retain community perspectives and minimize journalistic bias.

Results Of the 70 articles, 16 discussed store ownership models, 14 discussed community engagement, 22 discussed food affordability, and 18 discussed food accessibility. Findings were used to develop a Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada.

Conclusions There is growing interest in Indigenous-owned grocery stores and co-ops across Canada. Many communities use Indigenous-led governance initiatives to strengthen local economies through retail food systems. While these initiatives are not widely documented in academic literature, news media offers an important source for new insights.

Keywords Food governance, Indigenous food security, Retail stores, Remote Canada, Food accessibility, Food costs, Food affordability, Co-operatives, Media analysis, Indigenous entrepreneurship

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Background

High retail food prices in remote Indigenous communities across Canada result from multiple structural challenges, including small community sizes, geographic isolation, high transportation and operational costs, and limited retail competition [55, 57]. These factors contribute to disproportionately high rates of food insecurity, particularly amongst communities in rural and remote regions [7, 55, 57]. In addition to economic barriers, Indigenous food systems have been profoundly affected by colonial policies that have legislated the erosion of cultural practices, imposed European gender roles, suppressed Indigenous languages, and restricted access to traditional hunting, gathering, and agricultural sites [1]. The persistent impacts of colonization continue to shape food systems in these communities, influencing the availability and affordability of both traditional and store-bought foods [7]. Recent research illustrates that rising inflation rates and the subsequent high cost of retail foods have further exacerbated food insecurity, with Indigenous households experiencing significantly higher rates of extreme food insecurity compared to the national average [16, 110]. Across Canada, Indigenous people face some of the highest rates of food insecurity across all developed countries [8], underscoring the urgent need to address these systemic challenges.

Many remote Indigenous communities across Canada operate within a mixed economy, which presents both challenges and opportunities for food security [57]. Traditional foods (TF), obtained through harvesting, hunting, and fishing, remain essential to many Indigenous peoples' diets, with these foods being widely shared and redistributed within communities [28, 91]. However, remote Indigenous communities tend to exhibit higher rates of unemployment compared to the rest of Canada with greater reliance on public housing, lower health and education status [57], and a growing reliance on store-bought foods. Recent research shows evidence that retail foods currently contribute the greatest proportion of dietary energy for Indigenous populations in Canada [67].

Food governance—the policies, regulations, and laws shaping how food systems function (Sustainable Food Systems [94])—in remote Indigenous contexts is often framed around *traditional food security*, namely the availability and sustainability of TF. However, we argue that Indigenous food governance must also incorporate retail food systems to align with the current realities of remote food environments [91, 92]. Historical food governance structures often uphold systems that privilege white-settler values, objectives, and decision-making processes rooted in colonial governance models, which prioritize Eurocentric approaches and undermine Indigenous self-determination [43]. Retail food governance

explores these forms of hierarchy in relation to retail (grocery) stores and investigates how food is bought, sold, and used within communities. Although some literature exists on retail food governance in remote Indigenous communities in Australia [73, 86], there is limited research on store ownership models and community involvement in Indigenous retail food environments in Canada [56]. Regardless, the shared colonial legacy of Australia and Canada have common enduring impacts on current-day Indigenous realities, including in the realm of retail food governance.

Efforts on the part of remote Indigenous communities to address food insecurity invite consideration of the context of Indigenous entrepreneurship in the retail food sector. The management literature on Indigenous entrepreneurship that has blossomed since the late 1990s follows two broad approaches [78]. The first approaches Indigenous entrepreneurship simply as entrepreneurship, conceived as some version of mainstream approaches centred on individuals who are aimed at profit-maximization in market transactions and applied to Indigenous individuals or groups wherever they may happen to be. Some scholarly papers have adopted this perspective (e.g., [51, 72]), as have governments aiming to foster individual enterprise and self-employment among their Indigenous populations (e.g., [2, 10]).

A second approach challenges the uncritical acceptance of standard views of entrepreneurship and goes on to locate it specifically in Indigenous environments highlighting its embodiment of distinctive cultural values and organizational forms. Peredo et al. state that Indigenous entrepreneurs “may or may not be located in native homelands—many have been displaced or relocated. However, they are situated in communities of Indigenous people with the shared social, economic, and cultural patterns that qualify them as Indigenous populations” ([80], p. 12). This cultural embeddedness brings with it a complex, community-oriented structure and goals that challenge standard views of entrepreneurship. This approach recognizes that Indigenous entrepreneurship aims not just to achieve profit-making but rather targets a broad range of community benefits and general well-being for which profit is only a means [64, 77].

While Indigenous cultures are highly diverse, Peredo and Chrisman [81] draw attention to the term “community orientation” as a typical feature of many Indigenous populations. In such contexts, community members “experience their membership as resembling the life of parts of an organism, and... feel their status and well-being is a function of the reciprocated contributions they make to their community” ([81], p. 313). This leads naturally to collective organization and activity as fundamental to Indigenous community life. As

such, Indigenous entrepreneurship is often a collective undertaking in which whole communities or significant sectors thereof initiate and operate an enterprise in the community's interest. Thus, Indigenous entrepreneurship typically exhibits "entrepreneurial strategies originating in and controlled by the community, and the sanction of Indigenous culture" ([64], p. 2006). This collective organizational expression may take many forms, but its most pronounced is what has come to be known as community-based enterprise in which communities function as both entrepreneur and enterprise [81]. These features of Indigenous entrepreneurship hold potential for illuminating the activity of Indigenous bodies and communities to address food insecurity in their environments.

Haar [44] notes that mainstream entrepreneurial research often overlooks Indigenous peoples' motivations to engage in entrepreneurial activities. For example, for Māori, their culture and values are often at the forefront of entrepreneurial practices, which differ from mainstream or Western entrepreneurial practices [79]. Similarly, Morrison et al., [73] note that Australian Indigenous enterprises are used as a central strategy to improve welfare in their communities. Their findings show that Australian Indigenous businesses make a relatively more substantive contribution to community development than non-Indigenous-owned businesses, including more notable economic and social contributions, and movement toward community-oriented goals. Considering the shared colonial history, it is notable that studies like the ones conducted in Australia and New Zealand are almost completely absent from the peer-reviewed literature that focuses on remote Indigenous communities across Canada [56].

In Canada, remote Indigenous communities are primarily found in the northern parts of the provinces and in the territories. Retail food governance models in these communities comprise three actors: government(s), retail companies, and community. In these contexts, government and retail companies tend to have considerably more power than community actors [33]. Where retailers can impose 'standards' that are strategic material structures on global supply chains and suppliers, such standards can "have negative consequences, particularly for farmers and small retail shops. Vulnerable and marginalized rural populations are the most severely affected groups from the emergence of private retail authority" ([33], p. 26). To address high food insecurity rates among Inuit [48, 85], for example, it is important that community-identified priorities are addressed across multiple scales and that rights related to Indigenous food sovereignty and self-determination are upheld [55, 57] in ways that are not bound by retailing standards. These aims

align well with approaches to Indigenous food governance and Indigenous entrepreneurship.

A scoping review by Vaillancourt et al. [101] on retail food environments in Canada notes that only 3% of the literature referred to studies conducted in remote or other northern Indigenous communities. They state that "[t]he paucity of data on Indigenous food environments highlights the potential for research to be undertaken with these communities, developing Indigenous-informed methods to examine these unique and unconventional food environments" ([101], p. 17). The same study also identified a lack of focus in the retail food environments literature on food trade and investments, food labelling, and food prices.

While peer-reviewed literature about certain aspects of Indigenous retail food systems may be lacking, issues of retail food affordability and food governance in remote Indigenous communities are frequently addressed within the news media. Many Indigenous leaders understand and value media as a platform to amplify a diversity of Indigenous and other allied voices [70]. As such, published news articles that draw on Indigenous voices and perspectives offer an entryway to understanding firsthand experiences of community members [105] in cases where other data may be lacking.

Here, we undertake a systematic media analysis to investigate local perspectives on retail stores in Indigenous communities across Canada. More specifically, we examine the types of retail store governance models that exist in remote Indigenous communities and how different retail models impact community food systems and well-being. The objectives are to (1) describe retail food governance structures and their impacts (particularly on: ownership models, community engagement, food affordability, and food accessibility) in remote Indigenous communities, focusing on community perspectives, and (2) develop a Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada.

Methods

Following the methodological approaches of Reddy et al. [84] and Groene et al. [42], this systematic media analysis analyzes retail food environments in remote Indigenous communities across Canada. Our aim was to survey the presence of different types of retail stores in these contexts, including large corporate grocery chains, co-operatives, and Indigenous-owned stores, while also exploring community perspectives regarding these retail models.

Article identification and selection

At the outset of the study, we reviewed existing Indigenous retail food environments literature, which highlighted four themes as being essential for supporting

Indigenous retail food governance and food security: (1) store ownership models [8, 33]; (2) community engagement [63]; (3) food affordability [31, 56]; and (4) food accessibility [34]. These topics also align with food sovereignty indicators from Blue Bird Jernigan et al. [6], which include indicator 1—access to resources, and indicator 6—community involvement. We used these four key themes as our main priori framework for this study and developed inclusion and exclusion criteria accordingly (Table 1). These themes are founded in academic literature and were developed through an iterative process with the project team.

Following Reddy et al. [84], we worked with a library professional to develop a structured search strategy for the Canadian Major Dailies (CMD) database, which covers Canadian news, general news, business, and finance (see Appendix A). Search terms included those related to geographical areas in Canada, Indigeneity, and types of store ownership models. One hundred and forty-eight articles were assessed for inclusion. Despite initial expansion of the search string, many retrieved articles remained outside the study's scope, highlighting the under-representation of this topic. To complement the limited results, we searched Google News and examined the first 40 results for ten different search terms, as per Groene et al. (2019), resulting in 400 identified articles (10 searches \times 4 pages of 10 results each = 400). The searches were conducted between June and September 2023 (Appendix B).

Once duplicates were removed, the remaining 452 articles underwent a double screening process for eligibility based on predefined inclusion criteria (Table 1). First, TD and CS screened the articles using Covidence software; the title and first paragraphs of every article ($n = 452$) were scanned to determine their relevance to the study's four key themes (Fig. 1; $n = 317$ excluded). Criteria reflected relevance to the project objectives and relevance to the present day, with qualifying articles being published between 2016 and 2023. The majority of articles were published between 2019 and 2023, reflecting an intentional focus on recent articles to accurately capture realities of food retailing. However, a small number of articles from 2016 to 2018 were also included when their content was deemed directly relevant and aligned with the study's objectives, despite falling just outside the preferred 5-year window. If articles were deemed by either reviewer to be relevant to the study, the title, article link, theme, and date were saved. Where opinions diverged, articles were discussed by the reviewers, and a consensus was reached using the inclusion criteria to assess eligibility ($n = 65$ excluded). The

remaining articles (CMD $n = 8$, Google News $n = 62$) were retained for analysis (see Fig. 1).

Data extraction and synthesis

Given the lack of an established framework for analyzing the retail food shopping experience in remote Indigenous communities, this study sought to develop our understanding of these dynamics. Using a hybrid approach, we first deductively coded the 70 retained news articles into the four themes established from the literature: (1) store ownership models; (2) community engagement; (3) food affordability; and (4) food accessibility (Table 2). These themes were then refined inductively through the development of 11 'categories' (Table 2). Articles that related to more than one category were coded to both (Appendix C).

Recognizing that news articles are interpreted through a journalistic process and published through media sources, we extracted direct quotes by community members to ensure that their voices were highlighted. This allowed for a narrative analysis of the articles, ensuring that community perspectives remained at the forefront to highlight on-the-ground experiences within the retail food sector. During the coding process, the 70 retained articles were sorted into tables that indicated the relevant category(ies), an article summary, and important/impactful quotes. The quotes were compiled in summary tables; those stated by a community member and those related to social impacts (such as happiness or stress) were prioritized.

Framework development

To inform the development of our Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada, we drew upon Scoones' Sustainable Livelihoods Framework [88, 89], which offers a comprehensive approach to understanding aspects of development by identifying key factors and relationships that influence livelihoods. Our framework adapts this approach to the context of food retailing in remote Indigenous communities, integrating the four established pillars of food security — utilization, access, quality, and availability [111]— and situating these themes in a broader food systems perspective [29]. In addition, the framework incorporates a typology of retail ownership models and associated community-based initiatives aimed at enhancing local economic development and decision-making power.

Themes included in the framework were selected based on their prominence in Canadian news media on these topics, and their value lies in their engagement with the issues most frequently raised by community members

Table 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for news articles for this study

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Store Ownership Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Store ownership is one of the following: a) corporate, b) co-operative, c) Indigenous-owned, d) Indigenous-owned co-operative, e) other forms of ownership related to the study - Mention of funding for grocery stores in Indigenous communities (e.g. banks, government programming) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Store ownership is not stated or ambiguous. For example, if a store is noted to be on reserve but does not state whether it is community-run or owned by a large corporation, this does not inherently address ownership; therefore, the study would be excluded - Mention of funding that does not explicitly include Indigenous communities, such as funding for grocery stores in Ontario with no mention of targeted funds for Indigenous communities
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community members indicate that they can influence what is offered at the store - Communities own the store, and money is being returned to the community - The store is involved in local initiatives - Mention of community-based initiatives that are related to food accessibility - Mention of local food production, such as harvesting produce, hunting for game, farming, community gardens, or community-led food production initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large corporate programs that do not involve the community - Community programs that do not involve Indigenous people or Indigenous organizations - Programs that do not promote or oppose local food production and access to food in the community - Food programs related to larger urban centres
Food Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mention of food prices (high or low) - Mention of food quality, such as whether healthy food is often available or if produce is often received already moldy or damaged - Mention of funding or programs that aim to reduce prices (e.g., grants and subsidies) and information relating to program effectiveness - Discussion of how food prices affect community members (e.g., community opinions or testimonials) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any topic not mentioning price, quality, or food funding in remote, Indigenous communities - Information about high food prices in non-remote areas or non-Indigenous communities in Canada - Funding for food programs that do not mention Indigenous food systems (e.g., traditional foods) or communities
Food Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentions relationship between where the store is situated in relation to the community (including whether the store is located on reserve) - Mention of how the store is accessed by community members (e.g., by car, snowmobile, ATV) - Mention of food transportation and storage logistics (e.g., winter roads, air transport, barges, trucks, highways, other forms of transportation) - Mention of food labels in languages other than English (particularly in Indigenous languages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not mention where the store is situated and which community it serves - Does not include promotional programs that support food access - Does not mention how food is transported to the community - Does not include information about how people access the store, including any struggles they face - Language is not mentioned as a barrier to accessing food
Geographical Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remote communities were defined as those with limited access to other population centres (e.g., fly-in only), where they met at least one of the following criteria: eligible for the Nutrition North Canada Subsidy, included within Statistics Canada's delineation of the North, located in a remote area, or located in Inuit Nunangat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communities in Canada that are defined as neither Northern nor remote

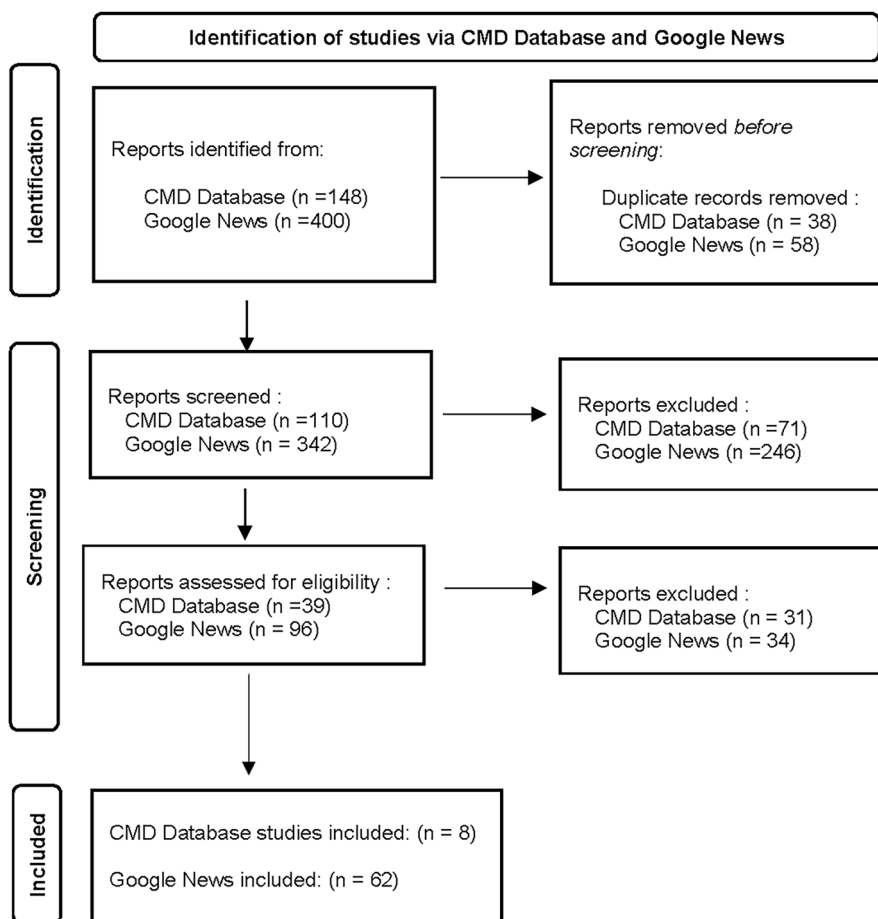


Fig. 1 PRISMA flow diagram of the media article screening and selection process

Table 2 Coding scheme for the retained news articles

Themes	Categories	Abbreviation	Times mentioned
Store Ownership Models	Corporate Owned	CO	5
	Co-ops and Indigenous-owned	COIO	18
	Local Food Production	LFP	4
	Banking and Funding	BF	5
Community Engagement	Decision-Making Power	DMP	7
	Locally Produced Foods	LPF	7
Food Affordability	High Food Prices	HFP	13
	Grants and Subsidies	GS	9
Food Accessibility	Distance to Grocery Store	DGS	9
	Food Labeling	FL	2
	Food Supply Chains	FSC	7

in remote Indigenous communities across Canada. We also drew on decades of experience working with Inuit community partners on community-engaged research and action projects. Notably, existing grocery retailing

frameworks largely omit considerations of Indigenous ownership, a critical gap that this framework seeks to address.

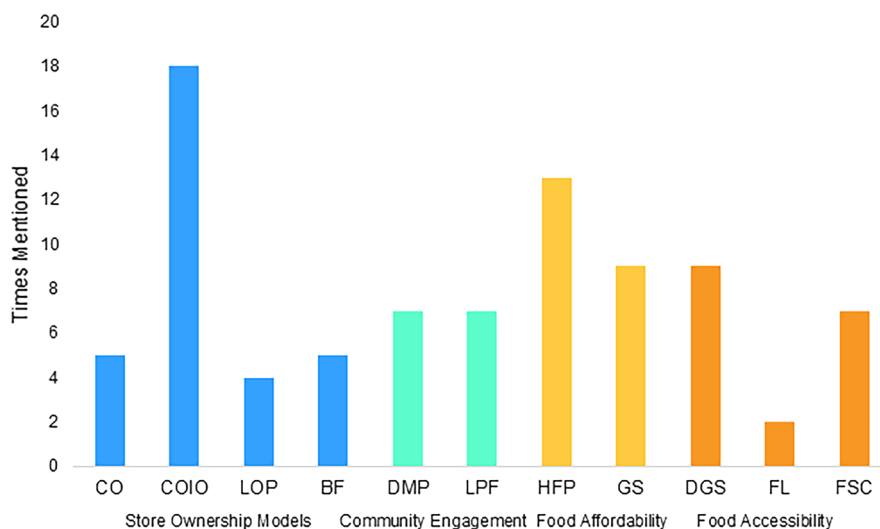


Fig. 2 Number of times themes were mentioned, by category. Categories: Store ownership models (blue): Corporate-Owned [CO], Co-operatives and Indigenous-Owned [COIO], Local Food Production [LFP], Banking and Funding [BF]. Community engagement (turquoise): Decision-Making Power [DMP], Locally Produced Foods [LPF]. Food Affordability (yellow): Food Prices [HFP], Grants and Subsidies [GS]. Food Accessibility (orange): Distance to Grocery Store [DGS], Food Labeling [FL], and Food Supply Chain [FSC]

Results

This section discusses the four interrelated themes that characterize retail food systems and food access in remote Indigenous communities. These include: store ownership models (four categories: Corporate-Owned [CO], Co-operatives and Indigenous-Owned [COIO], Local Food Production [LFP], and Banking and Funding [BF]; 32 articles), community engagement (two categories: Decision-Making Power [DMP] and Locally Produced Foods [LPF]; 14 articles), food affordability (two categories: High Food Prices [HFP] and Grants and Subsidies [GS]; 22 articles), and food accessibility (three categories: Distance to Grocery Store [DGS], Food Labeling [FL], and Food Supply Chain [FSC]; 18 articles) (Fig. 2). The themes are presented in an order that reflects their conceptual relationships: governance structures first (ownership and engagement), followed by barriers to access (affordability and accessibility).

Store ownership models

Of the 70 articles retained for analysis, 32 discussed store ownership. Ownership within the context of this study relates specifically to who owns the store and how it is run, while also recognizing that ownership can be directly linked to sovereignty and community decision-making power. Below, we discuss the four categories in store ownership models (1) large retail corporation, (2) co-operatives and Indigenous-owned stores, (3) localization of food production, and (4) community-oriented funding. The first two categories address the distinct forms of retail store ownership that emerged from our

analysis: (1) large retail corporations (the majority related to the NorthWest Company) (2) co-operatives, (3) Indigenous-owned co-operatives, and (4) Indigenous-owned stores. Next, we discuss multiple documented initiatives to encourage local food production in remote areas, whether Indigenous-run or not. Finally, we discuss community-oriented funding initiatives through Indigenous-banking and Indigenous-first banking that help promote food security in Indigenous communities.

Corporate-owned

Store ownership is a critical factor shaping food security and autonomy in remote Indigenous communities. Articles frequently described how corporate governance structures affect not only the cost of food, but also community perceptions of fairness, control, and accountability within local food systems. The high cost of groceries emerged as a persistent concern, with many individuals struggling to make economically viable food choices.

Among the corporate actors discussed, the North West Company (NWC) was most frequently mentioned. Operating in many remote communities—often as the dominant or sole retailer—the NWC was cited as a major influence on food prices and availability. For example, during one fiscal quarter in 2021, the company reported \$554 million in revenue, over \$1 million more than the previous year, largely due to reduced operating expenses during COVID-19 restructuring [65]. While many articles emphasized the challenges posed by corporate food retail, several also highlighted positive actions. These

included efforts to stock Indigenous products [46], pandemic-related wage increases [23], price-freezing after a fire in Iqaluit [32], and labelling initiatives to support Indigenous language revitalization [20].

Co-operatives and Indigenous-owned

Co-operatives and Indigenous-owned stores emerged in the media analysis as prominent and highly valued models of food retail in remote Indigenous communities. While there is no singular definition of an “Indigenous co-op” [107], co-operatives have long been embedded in northern Indigenous contexts. In particular, Arctic co-ops expanded rapidly in the 1960s, and many Inuit came to view them as their own innovation—reflecting a deep sense of collective ownership and alignment with community values [69]. As MacPherson notes, Inuit co-op members often expressed stronger attachment to these organizations than their southern counterparts.

Today, co-operatives continue to play an important role in strengthening local economies, especially in small and remote communities [103]. Although co-ops are sometimes met with skepticism in the broader Canadian population, research has shown that they tend to perform well during periods of economic stress, prioritizing wage stability and reinvestment over layoffs [103]. Their responsiveness to local needs and priorities makes them particularly well-suited to Indigenous community contexts. For example, in Old Crow, Yukon, the Gwich’in co-op redistributes profits among members based on annual expenditures, strengthening both affordability and local control [19].

In 2001, Indigenous consumer co-ops were growing twice as fast as other kinds of consumer co-ops in the broader retail sector in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Seen as a way to implement Indigenous values, co-ops offer a unique mechanism for Indigenous communities to meet community needs, improve local economic conditions, and increase local decision-making power [45]. In supporting financial freedom and autonomy, co-operative models and activities align with both the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and issues raised by Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission [104].

In this study, media articles also discussed multiple examples of successful independently-owned grocery stores in remote areas [50, 106], particularly Indigenous-owned stores either on reserve or in Indigenous communities [3, 9, 17, 40, 68, 74, 83, 93, 98]. Articles written about Indigenous-owned co-ops and stores contained elevated levels of expressed positivity, happiness, and gratitude amongst community members, not only because of the ownership model but because of the correlation between ownership and low pricing. For

instance, Grabish [40] discussed the fall 2022 opening of a community-run store in the northern Manitoba community of Pukatawagan, quoting community member Helen Bighetty:

‘This is absolutely wonderful prices. Like for this one here. This is a deal!’ she said, holding a package of frozen ribs priced at \$16.99. ‘If you shop in The Pas, it’s like \$25, \$30’. And it’s even more down the street at the Northern Store—until recently, the only place people living in the remote northwestern Manitoba community of Pukatawagan could get food. ‘When I try the Northern prices, my hands burn’ ([40], paras. 1–4).

The mission of this new community-owned store was to prioritize feeding the community over profits, by keeping prices low and food quality high [40]. Another community member, Theresa Bighetty, reflected on her long-standing hope for a local community-owned store, stating, “I’m happy... I feel it in my heart” ([40], para. 19).

Most articles that mentioned the opening of co-ops in communities noted many positive outcomes, including building local economies and reducing prices, which gives people more purchasing power and results in improved food security. This emphasizes the positive correlation between Indigenous ownership, primarily through Indigenous-owned co-ops, and alignment with Indigenous values, such as community agency and autonomy.

Local food production

Where media articles discussed ownership, they frequently highlighted the important role of locally farmed produce and investments in Indigenous-led food enterprises, particularly in the meat and butchering sectors, with some notable recent examples in northern Ontario. In 2021, Red Rock Indian Band (Northern Ontario) opened its own butcher shop where community members can store harvested meat (e.g., moose) in the shop’s freezers [98]. Through the storage, processing and sale of wild game, the manager hoped it would help revitalize traditions within the community, such as eating and sharing healthful foods. In 2023, Marten Falls First Nation (Northern Ontario) gained 51% ownership of Bay Meats to improve local food affordability and accessibility, with a future vision to develop a community-owned grocery store [9].

In the Northwest Territories (NWT), efforts to support local food production are on the rise. Increased agricultural capacity offers a source of nutritious local foods, and a cheaper food source for stores, including Indigenous-owned stores. Polar Egg, an egg producer dedicated to fostering local egg production throughout the NWT

[109] and other local farmers continue to organize and advocate for the production and selling of NWT produce [100]. With changing climatic and environmental conditions, many farmers and local gardeners are experimenting with new ways to farm. Twa [100] recounts how local farmers are proving that producing fresh and environmentally friendly food in the NWT is possible.

Local food production and ownership have been identified by many communities as essential for Indigenous food governance. Having access to locally owned produce, ensuring that food does not go to waste, and, expressly, being able to sell country foods to communities were noted in multiple articles as being of high importance.

Banking and funding

Access to capital is a critical factor shaping the ability of Indigenous communities to own and operate retail food stores. Media coverage emphasized the importance of Indigenous-controlled financial institutions and targeted funding programs in enabling food sovereignty and supporting local ownership models. For example, the First Nations Bank of Canada (FNBC) concentrates 90% of its operations within Indigenous communities, aiming to provide financial services and catalyze entrepreneurship in remote Indigenous areas [24]. The Indigenous Impact Fund, launched by Bridging Finance Inc. in 2019, was initiated to support Indigenous communities and projects engaged in sustainable economic development activities [58]. While this initiative has recently failed [60], it offers a potentially useful model for supporting Indigenous-led entrepreneurship around food provision in remote communities.

Provincial initiatives also play a role. In British Columbia (BC) the Indigenous-led New Relationship Trust received \$30 million in 2023 to fund food sovereignty projects [26]. Grants from the Indigenous Food Systems and Agriculture Partnership Program—offering up to \$80,000 per project—have supported training, systems planning, and small-scale food enterprises across 15 First Nations communities BC First Nations can apply to the grant program to support agriculture and food production activities. The Government of BC has also allocated up to \$80,000 per project through the Indigenous Food Systems and Agriculture Partnership Program, supporting Indigenous-led programs in food processing, systems planning, training, and skills development [38]. To date, the province has invested \$1.1 million in 15 Indigenous-led projects to promote food security and sovereignty. One example is a Xeni Gwet'in First Nations Government initiative to support TF practices, employ a local Indigenous food coordinator, and initiate a local farmers' market [22]. These diverse programs collectively promote

Indigenous food sovereignty by emphasizing traditional practices, food system development, and food security.

Community engagement

Of the retained articles, those discussing community engagement (14 articles) focused on community decision-making power (4 articles), the availability of local food (5 articles), retailer efforts to 'give back' to the community (3 articles), and services provided to the community (2 articles). There is significant interplay between local/Indigenous store ownership and community engagement. Examples such as Polar Egg [109] were coded under both ownership and community engagement themes, as they are both locally-owned and increase community access to local foods.

Decision-making power

The media analysis illustrated how opening a community-owned store or co-op, which are geared to give back to communities, increases both community decision-making power and community engagement. For instance, Moose Cree First Nation (northern Ontario) received \$100,000 for a feasibility study after community members continually expressed interest in having a community-owned co-op [13]. The community economic development representative stated that “[e]ach and every person that [invests] will have a say and an opinion and they can share their concerns on how we operate”, as well as being able to set prices of items and discuss the best ways to ship food to the community ([13], para. 7).

Another example is the community of Tk'emlups te Secwépemc (southern BC), which opened a community-owned store in 2023, which aimed to employ 150 band members in its first five years [83]. This store marks a significant achievement, fostering local employment, selling traditional Secwépemc cuisine, and providing the community with economic and decision-making autonomy.

Frustrated with the high costs associated with flying food to their community, the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation (north-western Ontario) partnered with Sioux Lookout and Lac Seul First Nation to purchase a 20,000-square-foot airport hangar that now serves as a regional food and supply distribution center [96]. The partnership, which increases community control over food shipment practices and prices, enables food shipments in otherwise empty cargo space on flights, reducing dependence on chartered flights [96]. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation aimed to place a food profit cap on the local store, while estimating that household grocery bills would drop by 40% for foods purchased in the community. These innovative, collaborative, entrepreneurial ventures illustrate the potential

of creative, community-driven, place-based solutions to improve the functionality and sustainability of local food systems in remote contexts.

Locally produced foods

Local food production includes a range of activities, from farming to wild meat harvesting and processing. Research and experience report that improvements in this area often result in increased food autonomy, security, and access to healthful food options, as well as a more engaged community. While First Nations such as Tk'emlups te Secwépemc can now sell TF at their community-run stores [83], selling traditional and locally produced food in communities continues to be a challenge, mainly due to food production laws. In one response to these challenges, a research project in four northern Ontario First Nation communities aims “to test their soil, select appropriate seed varieties, and cultivate crops to grow fresh, nutritious food, reducing their reliance on expensive, nutritionally-poor store-bought items” ([54], para. 2).

Research on local food production has generated increased autonomy within communities and offered more diverse healthful food options at reduced costs. In the NWT, local farmers advocate for increased investment and improvement of a range of farming practices. The Inuvik Community Greenhouse (northern NWT) aims to sell high quality produce at reduced prices and expanded its capacity through a 2021 hydroponic unit investment [100].

In Nunavut, there have been ongoing evaluations into the sales of locally produced foods and the links to food autonomy. Building on Nunavut's strong food sharing economy [47], a local market was opened in Iqaluit (Nunavut) to support the sale and purchase of a range of traditional Inuit foods, such as caribou [47]. Local chef, Sheila Flaherty, hopes to sell TF in her restaurant, supporting the incorporation of local food production into everyday lives. Encouraging local food production helps support the continuation of TF practices and provides a mechanism for community engagement around autonomous food practices.

Food affordability

In this analysis, food affordability refers to both the cost of food relative to household income and the perceived value or quality of available food [56]. In remote Indigenous communities, food prices are consistently inflated, with residents frequently reporting that healthful foods are both prohibitively expensive and of poor quality—frequently arriving moldy, bruised, or shriveled [55, 57].

Media articles consistently emphasized affordability as a central concern. Two dominant subthemes emerged:

the widespread presence of high food prices (11 articles) and the limited impact of subsidies or grants intended to offset those prices (11 articles). Community voices underscored that subsidies rarely go far enough to make nutritious food truly affordable. As such, the high cost of food remains a primary factor affecting food access and daily decision-making in these communities.

Food prices

The high cost of food emerged as the most prominent topic in this media analysis. Although the search terms used did not explicitly target price-related issues, food pricing consistently dominated articles on retail food in remote Indigenous communities. In many of these areas, food prices are significantly inflated—often forcing families to spend an unsustainable portion of their income on groceries. For example, a 2016 article reported that residents in Fort Albany, Attawapiskat, and Moose Factory (northern Ontario) were spending up to 50% of their income on food [49]. As one community worker noted, these costs influence every aspect of daily life—from nutrition to transportation [49]: “People have to think carefully about what they do and choose to buy—what they can afford to provide their children, do with their free time, whether they have a vehicle or not and can fill it with gas” ([49], para. 8).

A core driver of high prices is the cost and complexity of transporting food to remote regions. Despite government efforts like the Nutrition North Canada (NNC) subsidy, gaps in implementation persist. The program does not reach all communities and does not always reduce consumer prices as intended. For every dollar retailers receive through the subsidy, consumers save an average of only 67 cents [36], raising concerns about accountability and transparency.

Shipping costs have also surged in recent years. In 2021, the cost of flying food to remote Indigenous communities in Ontario rose 400% compared to pre-COVID-19 levels [112]. During the pandemic, despite all-season road access, Mishkeegogamang Ojibway First Nation (northern Ontario) had to establish flights for food delivery due to pandemic-related restrictions (which also limited travel of individuals on and off reserve). Local food prices rose to offset the more than \$3000 charge per air shipment [112]. In the NWT, the community of Tulita experienced price increases when they had to fly groceries in while waiting for the winter road to open [108]. The NWC director of business commented that when the demand is greater than the supply, the company must fly food in, resulting in higher costs for residents. However, the company does not report how much it costs to ship the food by air and how these costs are distributed [108].

While we know that “Food insecurity in the North was already called the longest-lasting public health emergency in Canadian history” ([75], para. 8), increasing food prices are exacerbating food insecurity in remote regions. At the same time, data limitations make it difficult to properly quantify how much food prices have truly risen in the North since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Statistics Canada measures inflation in Nunavut; however, only the three largest towns are evaluated, and the data does not break down components like fuel and food [75]. The president of Fort McKay Métis First Nation (northern Alberta) noted that while many Canadians have only more recently felt the effects of inflation, remote and Indigenous communities have been facing these issues for years, and they only continue to worsen [5]. Similarly, a community member from Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation (northern Alberta) stated, “If you have ever been to a Northern store there’s an incredible amount of price gouging, so much so that to actually be able to allow a family to survive you’re pretty much forced to buy low nutritional foods...I think some sort of an effort of price control in remote areas would be a good start” ([5], para. 12).

Food prices on reserves are also higher than those in surrounding communities, a fact that should raise serious concern. El Gharib [27] attributes this disparity to harsh climates, geographical isolation, and systemic barriers such as colonialism. For example, in 2022 an average “family in Attawapiskat, a First Nations community in northern Ontario, spent \$1,909 on food a month, compared to \$847 in Toronto” ([27], para. 6). High food prices are not just a financial burden, they are a direct threat to food security, health, and well-being, which often contributes to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and psychological stress [27]. This is concomitant with the fact that Indigenous people’s sovereignty has systematically been limited, and land-based knowledge practices have been diminished, creating a greater reliance on store-bought foods. In addition, some reserves lack a local store, requiring residents to pay increased costs to travel or order food from outside the community. Staples in many Indigenous diets such as Bannock are now becoming luxury items due to high flour and sugar prices [61].

The retained articles also described various efforts to improve affordability in northern communities. For example, Whitesand First Nation (northern Ontario) has held community markets where products such as vegetables, bread, and fruits are sold at affordable prices [52]. In Clyde River (Nunavut), two brothers opened the Baffin General Store to combat high prices provide their community with affordable food options

[62], and to combat food prices in the South Slave region of the NWT, Mike Sharpe transformed an old transit bus into a ‘Cash ‘n’ Carry mobile food store’ that sells food at 20–30% savings [11].

Grants and subsidies

Nine of the retained articles discussed funding mechanisms aimed at reducing food prices in Indigenous communities, particularly through grants and subsidies. As mentioned earlier in the section on banking and funding, there is a growing pool of resources—both governmental and private—supporting Indigenous-led food security and sovereignty efforts entities [22, 26, 38]. In British Columbia, for example, several provincial programs have been launched, including the 2023 Food Affordability and Innovation Fund, which aims to strengthen local supply chains by improving logistics, storage, and transportation [18]. In Ontario, grants also support Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. One example is Gaagige Zaagibigaa, a grassroots Indigenous organization that provides household grants to help community members purchase hunting and harvesting supplies [99].

The previously mentioned NNC subsidy is an important program serving eligible remote northern communities [19, 30, 53, 76]. Despite its potential benefits, valued at \$134 million annually, the subsidy is often criticized by dissatisfied community members for its failure to alleviate the high cost of living in the North. One central point of contention is the dominance of the NWC in the northern retail space, especially during COVID-19, when its profits rose by 82.5% while prices kept rising. This raises questions about the efficacy of the NNC subsidy in moderating prices [30, 76] and critiques about the combined effect of the subsidy’s shortcomings and the NWC’s business model which amplify food prices.

Another critique revolves around the lack of transparency in how NNC funds are distributed. While the NWC receives over half the total subsidy, other primary recipients include Arctic Co-operatives Limited and la Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec [53]. Despite the subsidy primarily benefiting small, primarily Indigenous communities with average populations of 1000 or less, few recipient retailers are community- or Indigenous-owned. This disparity prompts questions about why taxpayer dollars are funneling into southern-based retailers, which often operate as monopolies in northern communities [36]. The subsidy’s effectiveness is further questioned by examples like the First Nation-owned co-op in Old Crow (Yukon), where it only covers losses from perishable items. For instance, a 4-L jug of milk costs \$17.99 in Old Crow, compared to \$6.59 in Deer

Lake, Ontario [19]. Community members, supported by (former) NDP MP Niki Ashton, emphasized that the NNC subsidy is not sufficient to address food insecurity and the high cost of living faced by northern communities [30].

Food accessibility

Food accessibility was addressed in 18 retained news articles, including discussion of factors, such as location and distance to store sites, food labeling, and food supply chains. Articles made a clear distinction between food access concerns in urban areas, and the amplified challenges faced by remote Indigenous communities which often lack sufficient, stable, healthful food that is affordably priced and readily available. While ‘urban reserves’ offer innovative economic opportunities for band members, who then make significant contributions to the economic well-being of nearby cities [95], remote community residents lack this access, limiting their expansion into larger markets.

While events such as power outages [12] and road closures [14, 15] can severely disrupt food accessibility, there exist numerous examples of programs and policies at multiple levels that can improve access. Practices such as food circles [4] and the provision of financial support for country food harvesting can both increase food accessibility. Furthermore, broader community investment has been shown to improve food access, and the rise.

Distance to grocery store

For residents of road-connected remote communities with no grocery store, accessing food is often prohibitive. They must drive long distances to stores in other communities, often requiring full-day commitments to access food. For example, one article describes a 10-h trip to buy groceries in the Yukon [71]. Purchasing groceries involves a lot of pre-planning, including detailed grocery lists and meal coordination, as people often buy in bulk to reduce the frequency of travel. Yet, those on restricted budgets are unable to buy large quantities of groceries at one time.

Several articles noted that certain communities are waiting years for a local store to open [3, 40, 59, 93]. Having stores in communities and on reserves not only increases food accessibility, but often leads to local reinvestment of funds, as newly constructed stores are often community-owned or run as an affiliated co-op that seeks to lower food prices [40]. Overall, the presence of local stores tends to result in increased food autonomy and economic stability.

Food labeling

Two of the retained news articles discussed instances of accessible food labels at grocery stores in the NWT. First, the North West Company provided inclusive signage (English and the local Indigenous language) in almost all Northern and NorthMart stores during a national Language Month initiative [20], with the aim of encouraging people to learn and speak the local languages. QR codes were also placed on the food labels so customers could hear audio translations of the words displayed on the shelves. In the NWT alone, this initiative included seven different languages, showcasing various dialects [20]. A similar project was launched in Hay River (southern NWT) in the Super A Foods store. Slavey words for different foods were posted alongside scannable QR codes that linked customers to a website with Slavey pronunciations [97]. The Lutsel K'e (southern NWT) co-op had items listed in both English and Chipewyan, and in Fort Smith (southern NWT), items were displayed in Cree [97]. Incorporating Indigenous languages into retail food displays can serve as a ‘living dictionary’ [97] that reflects the diversity and history of people and languages in the region.

Food supply chain

As briefly discussed above, food supply chains heavily impact food accessibility. When there are shipping delays, store shelves can quickly empty of products, showcasing both the critical role and fragility of the supply chain. For example, shipping delays during the COVID-19 pandemic led to empty grocery store shelves in communities on Baffin Island (Nunavut), leaving residents without essential foods, such as bread, for approximately two weeks [66]. One resident described buying produce after the Sunday shipment arrived, but finding empty shelves when she returned on Monday [66]. An Iqaluit resident stated “[i]t is pretty slim pickings and a town of 8000 people shouldn’t have to get through it” ([66], para. 5).

The food supply chain is intrinsically linked to food security and health. A food, nutrition and environment study of First Nations across Canada found that food supply-related issues contributed to high food costs, poor nutrition, and food insecurity [41]. Ontario data showed that diets of the majority of Indigenous adults met neither the minimum recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables nor overall nutritional needs. Communities away from urban centers pay significantly higher food prices, correlating with increased consumption of non-nutritious foods [41] and negative health outcomes.

Highway closures can result in severe food shortages for road-connected communities. For example, when a July 2022 washout led to a 3-day closure of the Alaska Highway in northern BC, retailers in Yukon communities

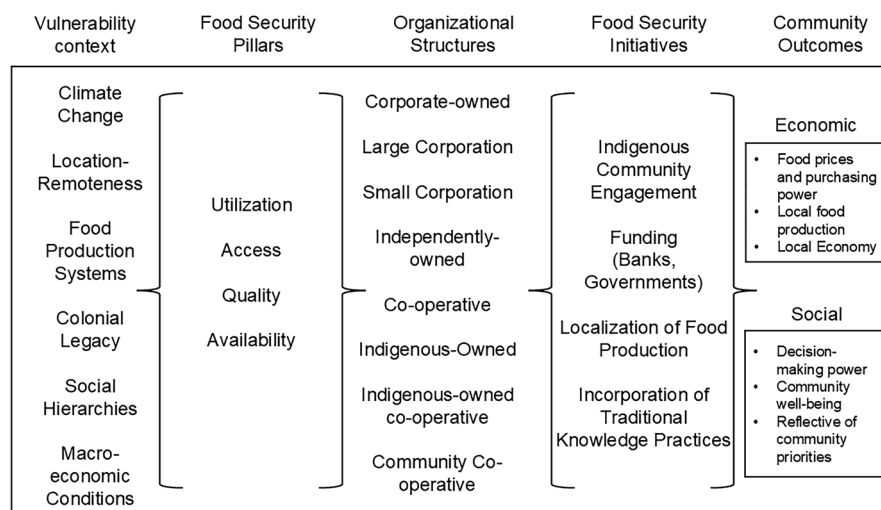


Fig. 3 Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada. Adapted from [88, 89] and [29]

experienced dwindling food stocks, prompting panic buying and empty shelves (CBC [14]). Two months later, bridge damage caused by vehicle impact led to a 2-day closure of the Dempster Highway (north-western NWT) where essential foods were flown in to affected areas [15]. Such high-impact events can lead to rapid depletion of food, particularly in communities that rely on a single food supply route, posing significant threats to food security.

Framework of retail food models

In this section, we draw on the study results to develop a framework that recognizes the vulnerability context of remote Indigenous communities in relation to food security pillars, integrates Indigenous-owned retail businesses and co-operatives as one of a range of organizational structures, and highlights pathways for retail stores to influence food security initiatives that lead to positive community outcomes. Our starting point, the Canadian Grocery Retail Guide [87], focuses on general store models and operations across Canada (see Appendix D for information on store types). However, it lacks a comprehensive understanding of co-ops and Indigenous-owned retail models, despite their presence not only in Canada but in Indigenous communities since at least the 1960s [21, 25, 69].

Existing research on store ownership of Canadian Businesses highlights a diversity of types of businesses and related decision-making power [90], Appendix E lists different types of owners). Our results show that Indigenous ownership tends toward increased community involvement and decision-making power. As such, the presence of Indigenous-owned stores and community-owned

co-ops in Indigenous communities tends to result in higher rates of community engagement and community satisfaction. By contrast, in communities where large corporations own the retail store(s), community members frequently indicate that they have limited influence on in-store operations and feel that foods are being offered at exorbitant prices. A key finding is that attitudes toward corporate-owned stores tend to be more negative, whereas attitudes towards Indigenous-owned grocery stores and co-ops are generally more positive. At the same time, corporate stores often benefit from efficiencies that enable greater food availability and diversity, and lower food pricing compared to small or locally owned stores (Fig. 3).

Recognizing these dynamics, our Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada is based on Scoones’ Sustainable Livelihoods Framework [88, 89], which examines the complex lens of rural development and acts as a checklist for a deeper understanding of the critical factors and complex issues in development [89]. Our Framework incorporates established food security pillars, namely utilization, access, quality, and availability [57, 111], which are also components of Fanzo et al.’s [29] food system framework. Moreover, our framework links food security to the many types of ownership models of retail stores in Canada and initiatives to achieve positive outcomes such as increased local economic activity and increased decision-making power. Ultimately, the framework acts as a guide to elucidate interconnections among food security in Canada, ways to incorporate Indigenous community needs and interests, varied ownership types, and desired economic and social outcomes that support food sovereignty.

Discussion

This study shows that numerous initiatives and organizations, actively support Indigenous entrepreneurship in remote communities, reflecting a commitment to community development. Programs such as Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in British Columbia support continued development of traditional practices and food security. Despite challenges in accessing funding, the rise of Indigenous-owned grocery stores and co-ops is positively impacting local economies and quality of life. Successful examples like Moose Cree First Nation and Tk'emlups te Secwépemc demonstrate the benefits of community-owned stores.

There is a growing interest across the country in expanding locally sourced food production to tackle high food prices and improve access to nutritious foods in remote Indigenous communities. This media analysis highlights the issue of high food prices, emphasizing the need for transparent reporting on supports like the NNC subsidy ([34–36]). Ensuring stable food access is crucial, requiring comprehensive supply chains and inclusive retail practices. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing research and community engagement to develop sustainable solutions for remote Indigenous communities. While there is some existing research on retail food systems in northern Indigenous communities [8, 110], this topic is still under-researched. Further assessments of retail system dynamics, governance and implications for community members are needed to better ensure food availability and access in these contexts.

At the same time, there is an important need for more research to assess the public and private food retailing sectors regarding health and nutrition [55]. Kenny et al. [57] also identify that private sector retail food structures may not be sufficient to enable affordable food prices. Cooperative and not-for-profit stores could effectively use retailer-based subsidies and incentives that improve benefits to communities, particularly those that are community-run and have their profits redistributed back into the community. Regardless, although this research begins looking at retail food models in remote Indigenous communities across Canada, more research needs to be done to better understand the roles and differences in the public and private sector in retail food environments.

The strengths of this media review are reflected in its systematic exploration of retail food governance in remote Indigenous communities through the lens of Canadian media reporting. By analyzing news articles from diverse sources, the review surfaces community-driven narratives often absent from academic literature, particularly regarding store ownership models, community engagement, food affordability, and food accessibility. The methodological emphasis on preserving direct

community quotes ensures that Indigenous voices are foregrounded, reducing the risk of journalistic distortion and centering lived experiences. Notably, the development of a Framework of Retail Food Models in Remote Indigenous Communities in Canada provides both a conceptual and practical tool for understanding the diversity of governance approaches. This framework, grounded in media-sourced community insights, reveals a growing movement toward Indigenous-led store ownership and co-operative models as vehicles for both increased economic stability and food sovereignty. By filling a critical gap in Canadian food systems research, this review sets the stage for further inquiry and policy development that supports Indigenous autonomy and structural transformation in food retail systems.

Limitations

While this review offers important insights and contributes meaningfully to the literature on Indigenous food systems and governance, it is equally important to acknowledge its methodological and contextual limitations. These considerations help situate the findings within the broader landscape of media research and food security discourse. This media analysis presents a snapshot in time of Indigenous retailing through the study period and some businesses may have closed or expanded since publication. Further evaluative, comprehensive, and mixed-methods research is necessary to fully understand the evolving nature of food retailing in remote Indigenous communities.

Additional limitations include the language of publication (restricted to English) and the impacts of COVID-19 (e.g., many stores experienced financial hardships during the pandemic that may not have been present if this study had been conducted before the pandemic). More specifically, some articles from co-ops in Quebec may have been missed if they were written in French.

The search string for databases initially had a “NOT (COVID-19)” qualifier, as many of the initial articles retrieved from the structured search focused on how grocery stores were adapting to the pressures of COVID-19, and were thus beyond the scope of this work. However, it was ultimately decided to exclude the “NOT (COVID-19)” search qualifier from the search string because it removed all articles that mentioned “COVID-19”, many of which contained information relevant to this research. We also decided not to remove articles related to COVID-19 as retailers experienced difficulties during the pandemic, so it was essential to note if food quality, processing, or shipment were impacted. For instance, evidence from remote Australia during the pandemic showed that disruptions in food supply chains significantly affected food security in Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander communities, and that media coverage often misrepresented the complexity of these issues [102]. Although this could potentially lead to more negative findings concerning COVID-19, it is important to note how various circumstances affect how stores operate.

As discussed in the methods section, news articles can be subject to reporter bias. Reporters often frame stories to align with their own narratives and may selectively choose quotes to support those frames. To mitigate these biases, we primarily relied on quotes from community members, treating them as direct expressions of their views rather than interpreting them through the lens of the reporter. Furthermore, many of the news sources used in this study were from Northern or Indigenous communities, such as press releases issued by the communities themselves about the stores they were opening. While this approach does not fully eliminate bias, we considered it a strategy to reduce the influence of external biases from more mainstream or non-community-based sources.

An important potential epistemological limitation of this study is that all members of the research team are non-Indigenous to North America. While we aimed to respectfully center Indigenous voices through direct quotations and community-published sources, we recognize that the interpretation and framing of these voices may still be influenced by Western research norms. The research questions for this study emerged from the interest of our northern community partner in exploring alternative retail models, understanding different store options and the challenges different retail models may present. Although the results were presented back to the community to help inform their decision-making, we acknowledge that the framework may not fully capture all Indigenous communities' views or knowledge systems. Future research would benefit from Indigenous-led collaboration or oversight to strengthen cultural accountability and community relevance.

Conclusion

Although academic literature on Indigenous store models is sparse in Canada, many news articles feature Indigenous voices that are advocating for better prices and conditions. There appears to be increasing community interest in Indigenous-owned grocery stores and Indigenous-owned co-ops, particularly in the context of remote Indigenous communities. Despite their growing importance, existing frameworks of Canadian food and retail services often fail to acknowledge or categorize Indigenous-owned or -run models as a distinct form of retail store in Canada.

High food prices are the most troubling issue for many people in remote Indigenous communities, with food costs often being two to four times higher than in urban centres. As illustrated by the quotes above, community members feel they are often paying unfair prices for food and have little autonomy over their food choices. While delving further into the social impacts of retail store dynamics should be prioritized across all Canadian communities, it is particularly critical in the context of remote Indigenous communities that are faced with critical levels of food insecurity, amplified by the compounding effects of climate change, historical injustices, and economic disparities. This is a holistic health issue, as personal stress related to grocery purchases affects physical and mental health. Programs that help counter these high prices have been implemented and adapted by communities, such as through food sharing, community cooking circles, and continued procurement of locally produced and harvested foods. However, more needs to be done to decrease the cost of food in retail stores. This includes understanding the governance structures that influence food systems and food environments for remote Indigenous communities across the country, in order to promote more equitable and sustainable access to retail food.

Appendix A

Search databases and search strings for the media analysis

Database	Search Strings
Canadian Major Dailies (CMD)	("Retail Food Governance" OR "Retail Store governance" OR "Retail Management" OR (related search phrases)) AND ("Indigenous Communities" OR (related search phrases)) AND Canad* OR (related search phrases...which included 41 search terms)
Google News*	Indigenous co-op, Canada Indigenous grocery stores, Canada First Nations grocery store Grocery stores in Yukon Grocery stores in Northwest Territories Grocery stores in Nunavut Indigenous co-ops in Quebec Indigenous grocery stores, British Columbia Indigenous grocery stores, Ontario Indigenous grocery stores, Manitoba

*Note: Consistent with Groene et al. [42], only the first four pages of results were reviewed due to the decreasing relevance of the search with each additional page

Appendix B

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the media analysis

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	News articles	Peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, books, social media posts, government documents, blogs, etc
Date Range	2016 to 2023	Dates prior to 2016
Location	Canada	All locations other than Canada
Language	English	All languages other than English

Appendix C

News articles retained for analysis

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Banking on Indigenous communities: First Nations Bank of Canada aims to make financial services accessible to the underserved	https://www.pressreader.com/canada/toronto-star/20210918/281844351770252	Banks and ownership, Indigenous owned	18-Sep-21	Canada		BF
A first for Canada: An Indigenous focused fund that projects 8-per-cent returns	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-first-for-canada-an-indigenous-focus-ed-fund-that-projects-8-per/	Banks and ownership, Indigenous owned	14-Apr-19	Canada		BF

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Pelly Bay co-op stands as proof of independence	https://www.proquiest.com/canadian/wsmajor/docview/386539401/5A87F91A070445D0PQ/15?accountid=14701	Co-op, Indigenous owned store	08-Nov-17	NWT		COIO
Neechi Commons will close Saturday, leaving Point Douglas without a proper grocery store – again	https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2018/06/28/neechi-commons-will-close-saturday-leaving-point-douglas-without-a-proper-grocery-store-again	Indigenous owned store	29-Jun-18	Manitoba		COIO
Roots run deep: Long before European settlers arrived, Indigenous peoples had established complex agricultural practices that are still relevant today	https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/agriculture/2022/10/08/roots-run-deep-2	Mention of access to healthy and local food and in proximity to community	08-Oct-22	Canada		DGS

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location		Categories	
				1	2	1	2
First Nation land gets licensed store; First In Canada	https://www.proquest.com/canadian/wsmajor/docview/2130655556/D13B6764D924420PQ/88?accountid=14701	Indigenous ownership on reserve	07-Nov-18	Manitoba	COIO		DGS
Larger companies collaborating with small businesses are offering up their reach – and their expertise	https://www.theglobalbeandmail.com/business/articles/larger-companies-collaborating-with-small-businesses-are-offering-up-their-reach-and-their-expertise	Large/small; 10-business collaboration	10-Jun-22	multi-province	CO		DMP
Concrete solutions: Poverty to prosperity	https://www.proquest.com/canadian/wsmajor/docview/2125556125/F493B7F5F14D45D2PQ/134?accountid=14701	Gives back to community	27-Oct-18	Manitoba			DMP

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location		Categories	
				1	2	1	2
Canadian Co-op Congress looks at inclusivity in co-ops	https://www.thecoop.ca/170952/topic/business/canadian-co-op-congress-looks-at-inclusivity-in-co-ops/	Co-op inclusivity	04-Jul-23	Canada			COIO
Making a difference: Indigenous co-ops in Manitoba and Saskatchewan	https://www.thecoop.ca/129544/sector/making-difference-indigenous-co-ops-manitoba-saskatchewan/	Indigenous co-op	03-Jul-18	Manitoba	COIO		
Co-op launches Indigenous gas bar program	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/western-nations-launch-1.5882376	Indigenous co-op agreements	21-Jan-21	Canada	COIO		DMP

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Indigenous designers at Neechi Com-mons'not in it alone'thanks to co-op structure	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/aboriginal-designers-cooperative-indigenous-designers-co-op-1.4738033	Indigenous statement that co-ops work	07-Jul-18	Manitoba	COIO	
Moose Cree First Nation gets \$100,000 for food co-op feasibility study	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/moose-cree-first-nation-food-co-op-feasibility-study-stan-kapas-hesit-1.538728	Funding for indigenous co-ops	08-Dec-19	Ontario	DCS	DMP
Pukatawagan residents celebrate opening of First Nation's new community-owned grocery store	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/pukatawagan-gets-new-grocery-store-1.6601153	Indigenous grocery store	02-Oct-22	Ontario	DCS	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Would you pay \$40 for a bag of flour? Some remote First Nations in northern Ontario have no choice	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/food-insecurity-finding-first-nations-1.6743020	High food prices	10-Feb-23	Ontario	HFP	
Food prices in the North are astronomical, despite subsidies. Who benefits from Ottawa's plan to tackle food insecurity?	https://www.nationalobserver.com/2023/03/23/news/food-prices-north-are-astronomical-despite-subsidies	High food prices	23-Mar-23	Ontario	HFP	
Why Food Is So Expensive on First Nations Reserves in Canada	https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/why-food-is-so-expensive-on-first-nations-reserves/	Food prices on reserve	21-Jul-22	Canada	HFP	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Cost of Getting Food to Remote Indigenous Communities Rose 400% During COVID	https://www.vice.com/en/article/k78nvy/cost-of-getting-food-to-remote-indigenous-communities-rose-400-during-covid	Rising food prices	09-Jul-21	Canada	HFP	
New study finds First Nations in Canada face serious problems with food supply	https://www.anishinabe.ca/news/2020/01/09/new-study-finds-first-nations-in-canada-face-serious-problems-with-food-supply/	Food supply chains	09-Jan-20	Canada	FSC	
Indigenous people in Northern Ontario spend more than half of income on food: report	https://www.theglobalbean.com/news/national/indigenous-people-in-northern-ontario-spend-more-than-half-of-income-on-food-report/article31822107/	High food prices	12-Sep-16	Ontario	HFP	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Food prices are insanely high in rural Canada where Ketchup costs \$14 and Sunny D costs \$29	https://www.businessinsider.com/food-prices-high-north-ern-canada-2017-9	Food prices on reserve	21-Sep-17	Canada	HFP	
New grocery store opens in Mattagami First Nation	https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/new-grocery-store-opens-in-mattagami-first-nation/article_b0159f98-2d97-55b1-8dd6-41b8f8685c52.html	New grocery store	11-Feb-21	Ontario	COIO	DGS
Tk'emlups Grocery Store set to open in 2023	https://www.kamloopsthisweek.com/local-news/tkemplups-grocery-store-set-to-open-in-2023-4449075	New grocery store	25-Jul-21	B.C.	COIO	DMP

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Indigenous leaders say inflation, supply chain problems worsening food insecurity in rural areas	https://www.fortmcmurray.com/news/indigenous-leaders-say-inflation-supply-chain-problems-worsening-food-insecurity-in-rural-areas	Inflation	24-Mar-22	Alberta	HFP	
Grocers fail to pass along full Nutrition North food subsidy to shoppers, study shows	https://www.utoronto.ca/main-news/grocers-fail-pass-along-full-nutrition-north-food-subsidy-shoppers-study-shows	Nutrition north subsidy	14-Sep-23	Northern Canada	GS	
A remote Ontario First Nation is taking control of its food	https://www.tvonews.com/remote-ontario-first-nation-is-taking-control-of-its-food	Community trying to reduce food pricing	28-Jul-17	Ontario	DMP	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Indigenous food sovereignty gets \$30-million boost	https://www.kamloopsnews.com/local-news/indigenous-food-sovereignty-gets-30-million-boost-7335321	BC food programs	27-Jul-23	B.C.	GS	BF
Rebuilding the Heart of Wáglísla: Haaq Invest in Community-owned Grocery Store and Bakery	https://www.coastfunds.ca/stories/rebuilding-the-heart-of-waglisla-heilt-suk-invest-in-community-owned-grocery-store-and-bakery/	Community-owned grocery store	11-Feb-20	B.C.	COIO	DGS
Indigenous Entrepreneur Revives Hillsborough Grocery Store After Rural Move	https://www.919th.com/2022/04/12/indigenous-entrepreneur-revives-hillsborough-grocery-store-after-rural-move/	Indigenous entrepreneur	12-Apr-22	New Brunswick	COIO	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Indigenous business owners in NWT not letting pandemic slow them down	https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/indigenous-business-owners-in-fort-providence-not-letting-covid-19-slow-them-down/	Indigenous business	23-Jan-21	NWT	COIO	
Marten Falls First Nation invests in 51% ownership of Bay Meats	https://www.snews.swatch.com/local-news/marten-falls-first-nation-invests-in-51-ownership-of-bay-meats-7587708	Indigenous investment	22-Sep-23	Ontario	COIO	
Townline Variety and Clover Farm Grocery now open on Six Nations	https://www.tworowtimes.com/news/local/townline-variety-and-clover-farm-grocery-now-open-on-six-nations/	New convenience store	13-Apr-22	Ontario	DGS	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Nutrition North program failing to keep food costs low at the Old Crow Co-op	https://www.yukonnews.com/life/nutrition-north-program-failing-to-keep-food-costs-low-at-the-old-crow-co-op/	Co-op	21-Jan-23	Yukon	GS	
I travel 10 h to buy groceries — what it's like + photos	https://www.insider.com/what-its-like-driving-10-hours-for-groceries-remote-canada-2022-7	Food accessibility	11-Jul-22	Yukon	DGS	
Shelves bare at Whitehorse grocery store, after Alaska Hwy closed due to wash-out	https://www.yahoo.com/shelves-bare-whitehorse-grocery-store-224123616.html	Food accessibility	04-Jul-22	Yukon	FSC	
Yukon-raised chicken for sale in local grocery stores for 1 st time	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-farm-gate-chicken-grocery-stores-1.5662465	Local foods	27-Jul-20	Yukon	LPF	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Some N.W.T. grocery stores affected by full closure of Dempster Highway in the Yukon	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dempster-highway-closure-eagle-river-bridge-repairs-1.6574541	Food accessibility	dep 7, 2022	Yukon	FSC	
Independently owned Saanich grocery store makes top 3 in all of Canada	https://www.saanichnews.com/business/independently-owned-saanich-grocery-store-makes-top-3-in-all-of-canada-323093	Independent store	27-Nov-22	Yukon	COIO	
Construction of new Save on Foods to start this year	https://www.yukonnews.com/construction-of-new-save-on-foods-to-start-this-year/	Construction of store	01-Apr-16	NWT	CO	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Polar Egg is coming back—but it never truly left your fridge	https://www.cbc.ca/news/economy/food/polar-egg-is-coming-back-but-it-never-truly-left-your-fridge/	Local produce	10-Jan-23	NWT	LPF	
Indigenous languages to show up on northern grocery shelves	https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-grocery-labels-1.4328288	Language	04-Nov-2017	NWT	FL	
Pass the dedha: Grocery stores bring Indigenous languages to the aisles	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/language-program-stores-1.4003990	Language	01-Mar-17	NWT	FL	
Grocery bus attempts to beat high N.W.T. food prices	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/grocery-bus-attempts-to-beat-high-n-w-t-food-prices-1.2782456	Grocery bus	30-Sep-14	NWT	HFP	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
N.W.T. farmers show growing fresh, local produce is possible but needs financial support	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-farmers-need-support-1.6297277	Local produce	24-Dec-21	NWT	LFP	LFP
Tulita, N.W.T., food prices jump as Northern Store flies in groceries	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/tulita-food-prices-road-1.341428	High food prices	22-Jan-16	NWT	HFP	
Cold and hungry: Food inflation bites Canada's north	https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cold-hungry-food-inflation-bites-canada-as-north-2022-08-08/	Food insecurity	08-Aug-22	Nunavut	HFP	
Why millions of dollars in federal grocery subsidies haven't lessened food insecurity in the North	https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/north-food-prices-nutrition-north-marketplace-1.5074520	Food subsidies	29-Mar-19	Nunavut	GS	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Food prices in Clyde River motivate brothers to open grocery store	https://www.nunavutnews.com/nunavut-news/food-prices-in-clyde-river-motivate-brothers-to-open-grocery-store/	Local groceries	24-May-19	Nunavut	HFP	
Freight backlogs leave some Baffin grocery shelves bare	https://nunat.siaq.com/stories/article/freight-backlogs-leave-some-baffin-grocery-shelves-bare/	Shipping	11-Jan-22	Nunavut	FSC	CO
Is there room in Nunavut's sharing economy to sell traditional food? This Iqaluit chef thinks so	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/traditional-inuit-food-market-green-land-iqaluit-1.6420672	Local produce	19-Apr-22	Nunavut	LFP	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Canada's small businesses could be saved by converting them to co-operatives	https://www.corporatekateknight.com/leadership/canadas-small-businesses-could-be-saved-by-converting-them-to-co-operatives/	Co-op	10-Aug-21	Quebec	COIO	FSC
Food Affordability Fund launched for rural B.C.	https://www.e-know.ca/regions/east-cootenay/food-affordability-fund-launched-for-rural-b-c/	Food affordability	21-Sep-23	B.C.	GS	
Indigenous-led projects support food sovereignty, food security in B.C.	https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023AF0031-000738	Food sovereignty	16-May-23	B.C.	GS	
Indigenous-led projects get \$1.1 M to grow food security	https://www.vancouverislandfreedaily.com/news/indigenous-led-projects-get-1-1m-to-grow-food-security-sovereignty/	Indigenous run programs	19-May-23	B.C.	GS	BF

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Indigenous communities, businesses get support to increase food security	https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022AF0060-001414	Food security and climate change	21-Sep-22	B.C.	GS	BF
United Way launches Food Link app in North Okanagan	https://www.vernornorningstar.com/community/united-way-launches-food-link-app-in-north-okanagan	Food app	06-Mar-23	B.C.	LPF	LFP
Sowing the seeds of Indigenous food sovereignty in the North	https://www.northernontariobusiness.com/industry-news/agriculture/sowing-the-seeds-of-indigenous-food-sovereignty-in-the-north-7470656	Food options	31-Aug-23	Ontario	LPF	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
How White-sand First Nation tackles food insecurity through its community market	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/white-sand-first-nation-community-food-market-1.6825648	Community market	01-May-23	Ontario	HFP	
Household grants help build food sovereignty for First Nation families and communities in northern Ontario	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/gaagi-bigaa-household-grants-1.6686172	Grants for food	16-Dec-22	Ontario	GS	
Indigenous food bank offering traditional fares set to open in London, Ont. this fall	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/indigenous-food-bank-opening-london-ontario-1.6551791	Food banks	16-Aug-22	Ontario	LFP	

Title	Link address	Summary	Date	Location	Categories	
					1	2
Stories from Anemki Wajiw: Indigenous Food Circle	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/jolene-banning-anemki-wajiw-food-1.6114699	Food circles	24-Jun-21	Ontario	DGS	
Red Rock Indian Band continues to work on food sovereignty with opening of its own butcher shop	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/rrib-butcher-shop-opens-1.6297495	Indigenous owned shop	26-Dec-21	Ontario	LFP	LPF
These volunteers hit the ice road to improve food security in northern First Nations communities	https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/food-security-manitoba-1.6382355	Food accessibility	14-Mar-22	Ontario	FSC	

Appendix D

Types of Food Retailer Models in Canada*

Type	Definition
National Retail food chains	Canada's three largest food retailers—Loblaw, Empire (Sobeys) and Metro—operate in every province and have various 'banner' brands

Type	Definition
Regional food chains	Regional food retailers have a strong presence in specific provinces or regions, often focusing on local sourcing and community engagement (e.g., Farm Boy, Thrifty Foods, Highland Farms, IGA, Safeway, Longo's)
Regional major independent food retailers	Regional independent stores are often smaller than supermarkets, focus on specific product categories, and offer more community-oriented service (e.g., North West Company, Save-On-Foods, Your Independent Grocer)
Independent and speciality retailers	These stores are independently owned and operated; some specialize in health food, ethnic, local, and gourmet markets
General Product Retailers	These stores are general retailers that have expanded into food retail markets (e.g., Giant Tiger, Costco, Walmart)
Convenience Stores (C-stores) and Drug Stores	The majority of c-stores in Canada are operated under Couche Tard (Quebec only), Circle K or 7-Eleven. However, there are still various 'mom & pop' c-stores that are family owned and operated, which usually buy inventory from wholesalers and distributors

*Adapted from Saskatchewan Grocery Retail & Foodservice, 2013 [87]

Appendix E

Types of Business Owners in Canada*

Types of business owners	Definition
Corporation	Corporations themselves often own shares in other enterprises, known as inter-corporate ownership and is monitored by the government
Not-for-profit organization	Types of not-for-profit ownership include non-governmental organizations, foundations, universities, and churches
Government	Also known as crown corporations are owned by Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal governments, which are often used as instruments for public policy implementation

Types of business owners	Definition
Employees and Managers	Managers and employees can own all or partial parts of a corporation. This can be through employee stock purchases or employee share ownership plans
Consumers and customers	The most common form of a consumer-owned model is the co-operative model. Types of co-ops include consumer co-operatives and financial co-operatives, which are often leaders in institutionalizing ethics and responsibilities
Producers	Producer ownership is through a co-operative model; Canada has over 150 agricultural marketing co-operatives
Entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurs are individuals who start and own a business, many of which remain small
Venture capital companies	A type of private equity that acquires part ownership of businesses for which they provide management and financial assistance
Investors	Investors are individuals who provide capital to businesses by investing in company shares; they are not involved in business operations
Mutual Funds	Mutual funds are investment companies that pool money from multiple investors to invest in a range of assets; these companies thus become shareholders of individual businesses
Pension Funds	Canadians pension funds pool money from employer and employee contributions to invest in diversified portfolios, including publicly listed companies and privately held businesses
Private equity firms	These firms manage large amount of money that have been acquired by wealthy individuals, families, or institutions (such as mutual and pension funds)

*Adapted from Sexty, 2020 [90]

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Declarations**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

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Consent for publication

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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