

How mega-mansions increase risks of heart disease and diabetes

June 22 2018, by Bonnie Fournier



Credit: Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

Farmland is disappearing in many provinces across Canada. According to Larry Davis of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, [350 acres of farmland are now lost per day in Ontario alone](#) to non-agricultural uses

such as luxury housing.

Converting [agricultural land](#) to residential use in this way has detrimental effects on our health. Most worrisome is the potential of this conversion to increase rates of [cardiovascular disease](#), diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and certain types of cancer.

The loss of agricultural land reduces the supply of locally grown vegetables, fruit and grains. This shortage drives up prices and threatens household [food](#) security. Being [food insecure](#) means you have a limited or unsustainable access to nutritionally adequate, safe foods or the inability to acquire personally acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

As a registered nurse with 20 years of experience, I have seen first-hand the health issues that arise when individuals are not able to access healthy food. [My research in the Canadian Arctic](#) demonstrated the many complex challenges of being able to access [nutritious food](#) from the land.

Our health and well-being are directly tied to the land. We must find ways to preserve, protect and maintain farmland for agricultural use. Our health depends on it.

Nutrient-poor foods

According to Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index, the [cost of fresh vegetables and fruit in Canada has increased significantly in recent years](#). In 2017, tomatoes cost 16 per cent more than in 2016, and potatoes are up by almost 10 per cent.

Relying on fresh produce from the United States, especially from drought-affected California, also contributes to high costs at the cash

register and in turn limits what we can purchase.

Agricultural land that is used to build mega mansions instead of being actively farmed, [as is the case in Richmond, British Columbia](#), can create a dependency on food that is inexpensive and nutrient-poor —leading many on the path to develop various types of chronic [disease](#).

Such foods tend to be processed, high in fat (e.g. butter, oils, fried foods), sugars or starch, and promote over-consumption. This leads to weight gain over time. [Obesity is a major factor in cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer](#).



A farm in Caledon, in the Greater Toronto area of Ontario. Credit: Michael Gil

Stress, heart disease, diabetes

People cannot choose healthy nourishing foods when they are financially unaffordable. This forces individuals to become food insecure, and feel less in control of their lives.

Research shows that [the less control you feel over your life](#) due to limited or non-existent choices, the more stress you feel. [Stress also has been linked](#) to [heart disease](#), cancer and other chronic diseases.

Individuals who are food insecure are also [more than twice as likely to develop Type 2 diabetes](#) as those who are food secure.

Being able to control your blood sugar is challenging when you aren't able to afford nutritious food and follow a diabetic diet.

Also, when you factor in the cost of treatment for these chronic conditions, income that could have been used to purchase nutritious food is now being diverted, resulting in a vicious cycle of [health issues](#) and nutrient-poor foods.

'Health in All Policies'

A recent report by the [Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry](#) does not go far enough to protect agricultural land loss to development.

Among its five recommendations, the report calls for a tightening of restrictions on non-Canadian ownership. Eliminating policies that benefit

foreign buyers and monitoring farmland for evidence of farming is required in order to reduce non-agricultural use of farmland. Our municipal and provincial governments must be held accountable.

Changing agricultural policy can influence food availability and food prices at the local, provincial and federal levels.

["Health in All Policies"](#) is an approach, promoted by the World Health Organization, that ensures decision makers are informed about the health, equity and sustainability consequences of various options during the policy development process.

We can improve the health of all people by incorporating [health](#) considerations into agricultural policies.

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