

Thought About Food?

Understanding the Relationship Between Public Policy and Food Security in Nova Scotia

A Background Paper & Policy Lens

October, 2006

Prepared by:

Policy Working Group of the Nova Scotia
Participatory Food Security Projects

Prepared for:

Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
Collaborating Family Resource Centres/ Projects in Nova Scotia
Nova Scotia Nutrition Council
Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection



Thought About Food? Understanding the Relationship Between Public Policy and Food Security in Nova Scotia: A Background Paper & Policy Lens

is one of a group of documents produced by the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects. It is meant to support policy makers across all levels and sectors of government in making policy decisions that contribute to the food security of Nova Scotians.

Also in this Collection:

Participatory Food Security Projects Full food Costing and Story Sharing Report, 2004

Examines the cost and affordability of a basic nutritious diet in 2002 and the experience of food insecurity among women throughout Nova Scotia.

A National Environmental Scan of Strategies for Influencing Policy to Build Food Security

Examines strategies that have been used to influence policy to build food security across Canada and provides tips for policy change.

Thought About Food?: A Workbook on Food Security & Influencing Policy

Provides tools and information, in English and French, to facilitate capacity building for *Food Security for All* through system change. The Workbook and its accompanying DVD *Food Security: It's Everyone's Business* is available in both official languages from www.foodthoughtful.ca

Each document is complete in its entirety, however for a full picture of the work of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects, please see <http://faculty.msvu.ca/foodsecurityprojects/>

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Nova Scotia Nutrition Council

AHPRC

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On behalf of the NS Participatory Food Security Projects
Dr. Patty Williams, Principal Investigator

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Introduction

In 1996, the United Nations hosted the World Food Summit to encourage all sectors of society to join forces in a concerted campaign to ensure food security for the world's people. Action plans were developed, a follow-up meeting was held five years later, and work continues around the world to address food security. To find out more about *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security*, and the progress Canada has made since 1996 both internationally and within our own country, we invite you to explore Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Food Security Bureau at <http://www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fsb/>.

In recent years, the Nova Scotia Government also committed to building food security through the provision of financial support to the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects (for more information about the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects, please see Appendix C). *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia*¹, the new Provincial Healthy Eating Strategy, released in March of 2005 also identified food security as a key priority action area for health professionals and stakeholders throughout Nova Scotia. This document, developed by the Healthy Eating Action Group of the Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity, marks a significant milestone for the food security movement in this province.

The Nova Scotia Food Security Network Steering Committee that evolved from the provincial Participatory Food Security Projects has adopted two objectives to guide our work as we strive to build food security in this province.

- **To increase the proportion of Nova Scotians who have access to nutritious foods; and**
- **To increase the availability of nutritious, locally produced foods throughout the province.**

But what does food security mean for Nova Scotians? Do we have a problem with food insecurity in Nova Scotia? What are the factors that affect the food security of our families and communities? What can we do to increase food security in Nova Scotia? This document attempts to clarify these questions in order to support policy makers, who have the ability to make tangible changes to the growing problem of food security in Nova Scotia.

How to Use This Policy Lens

The purpose of this document is to support policy makers across all levels and sectors of government in making policy decisions that contribute to the food security of Nova Scotians.

Part One: Understanding Food Security explains what is meant by food security and how it impacts the lives of every single Nova Scotian. It illustrates how the issue of food security intersects unforeseen policy sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, community services, economic development, education, environment and labour, health, housing and justice. Intersectoral, collaborative action to address food security can be a useful tool to address priorities such as health, healthy child development, health disparities, environmental sustainability, economic renewal and community empowerment.

Part Two contains a *Food Security Policy Lens*, which is a series of analytical questions designed to promote critical thought about the impact of program and policy decisions on food security in Nova Scotia. By examining a realistic example, readers are led through two policy options that show how this lens is applied.

The Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects anticipate that our Background Paper, Part One, will generate in policy makers a clear appreciation of how their actions impact food security. We hope that our Food Security Policy Lens, Part Two, will help policy makers across all government sectors to actively contribute to the continual development of food security for *all* Nova Scotians.

We are concurrently developing a report, *Working Together for Ongoing Food Costing - Policy Solutions to Build Food Security: Participatory Food Costing 2004/05*, that gives more detail about the current food security situation in Nova Scotia. It includes information on the cost and affordability of a nutritious diet in Nova Scotia for various household types, and on the availability of locally produced foods. In an effort to advance our efforts to influence policy decisions, some of this work is currently available in the short report, *Building Food Security in Nova Scotia Through Participatory Food Costing: 2004/05 Food Costing Update*.

(http://www.nsync.ca/research%20food%20costing%20project_files/food_costing_2004_05_summary_report_final1.pdf)

Part 1:

Understanding Food Security



What is Food Security?

Food security means different things to different people. It means being able to get all the healthy food you need and to enjoy it with friends, family and your community. It means not having to worry about having enough food or enough money to buy food. Food security also includes being able to make a living by growing and producing food in ways that protect and support both the land and the food producers, and that ensure that there will be healthy food for our children's children.² In other words, food security means that an **individual or a community has access to nutritious, safe, personally acceptable and culturally appropriate foods that are produced, procured and distributed in ways that are environmentally sound and socially just** (adapted from Fairholm 1998).

Food security is the goal that all levels of government and communities organizations need to work toward. The information contained in the rest of this document will provide the “case” for this statement.

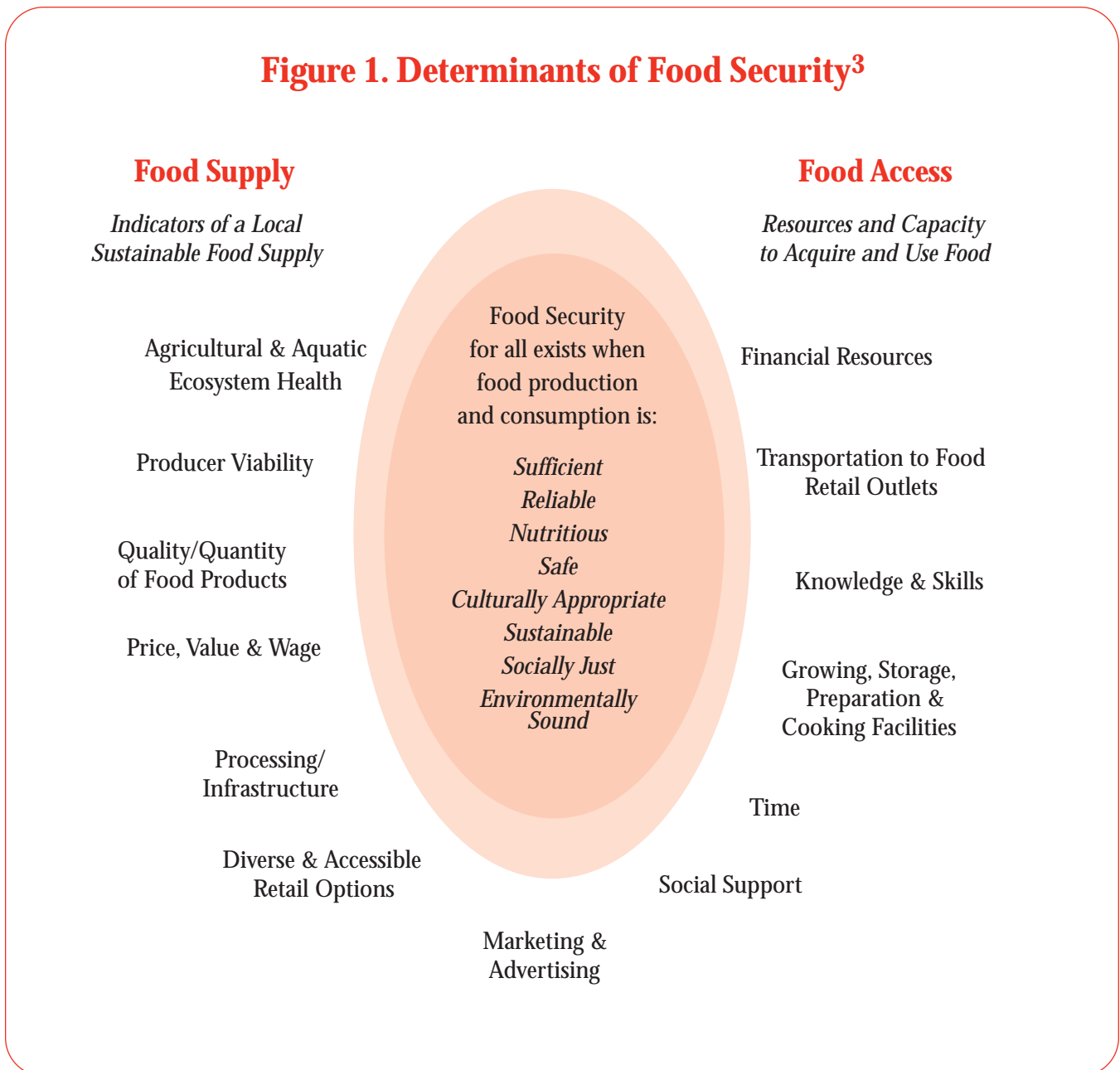
Food insecurity is the opposite of food security and, as you will learn in the next Section “Is Nova Scotia a Food Secure Province?”, is the situation that currently exists in Nova Scotia. Food insecurity means that people cannot access enough healthy food that they like and enjoy. It means continually worrying about where your next meal will come from. It means worrying whether or not your food is safe to eat and if the way our food gets to us has had a negative impact on the environment. It means wondering if there will be less food in the future because of the way we are growing and producing food now.²

What Determines if Our Food System is Secure?

We often think about food in a very simple way—it is something that we eat when we are hungry. But in reality, **the food on your table is part of a complex system of food production, processing, transportation, marketing, purchasing, preparation, consumption and disposal.** Every aspect of this food system impacts food security in our province.

Considering the complexity of the food system, it is easy to see that many factors determine food security. Figure 1 shows the determinants of food security and their interrelationships.

Figure 1. Determinants of Food Security³



Determinants Related to Food Supply

Food Supply Determinants of Food Security

- Agricultural & Aquatic Ecosystem Health
- Producer Viability
- Quantity & Quality of Food Products
- Price, Value & Wage
- Processing & Infrastructure
- Diverse & Accessible Retail Options
- Marketing & Advertising

As shown in Figure 1, there are several food supply indicators that impact food security. **Agricultural and aquatic ecosystem health** indicates whether or not food is produced in a way that is sustainable, safe, environmentally sound and socially just. For a community to be food secure, food must be produced, processed, transported and procured in a manner that does not threaten the future of the environment and supports agriculture or fishing activities. Sustainable development of resources will ensure that future generations can produce food to meet their health and well-being.

For a community to be food secure, our food system must maintain **producer viability**. All types of operations must have the opportunity to be sustainable including smaller family farms. A secure food system provides a diversified, open and self-reliant supply of food and maximizes commerce and connections between local customers, producers and processors to keep dollars circulating in the community. The **quantity and quality** of foods that are produced throughout the food system must also be nutritious, safe, culturally appropriate, personally acceptable and sufficient to meet the needs of the community.

The **price** that is paid for food and the **value** that the customer receives impacts food security. The pricing system must be just and transparent, both locally and globally, ensuring all participants, such as producers, processors and retailers receive fair **wages** for their products, investment, time and labour. A secure food system also ensures that there is adequate **infrastructure for processing**. A secure food system satisfies both the supply of and the demand for **diverse and accessible retail options** for consumers and suppliers. A wide variety of retail options from traditional grocery stores to farmers markets and Community Shared Agriculture⁴ subscriptions offer consumers choice, value and a variety of affordable and nutritious foods within reasonable proximity¹. These retail options provide opportunities for producers and processors to market their products and connect directly with the consumer. A secure food system recognizes and addresses the impact that food transportation has on the quality of the food, the economy and the environment.

In a food secure community, food is **marketed and advertised** by the food system players to ensure that individuals are aware of both the positive and negative health implications of food choices. Marketing and advertising in a food secure system is not aimed at vulnerable groups for certain products, such as targeting children for junk food. This is important because data clearly show that television advertising can influence decisions about what foods to buy among both children and their parents. In addition, media messages can shape children's knowledge and choices of certain foods.^{5,6}

¹ As outlined by the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Community Shared Agriculture, also referred to as Community Supported Agriculture or CSA, are direct-marketing based farm business models where consumers purchase annual shares from a local producer in exchange for weekly deliveries of seasonal produce.

Determinants Related to Food Access

In a food secure community, everyone has both the opportunity and the resources to buy good quality food for their families and themselves. At an individual and household level, food security is dependant on access to food, which requires that food be available close to home, and that people can afford to buy it. **Financial resources**, which are widely recognized as the single most important determinant of health,⁷ are also recognized as the most important determinant of food security. For food security to exist within a community, all paid work and financial assistance programs such as income assistance must provide people with sufficient financial resources to feed all family members a healthy diet.

Access to Food Determinants of Food Security:

- Financial Resources
- Transportation to Food Retail Outlets
- Knowledge & Skills
- Growing, Storage, Preparation & Cooking Facilities
- Time
- Social Support

Many people who struggle to afford a healthy diet do not have access to a private vehicle; therefore, the distance to retail outlets and markets is of concern. A food secure community addresses **transportation to food retail outlets** through investment in public transportation and municipal planning as well as innovative options such as farmers markets, carpools, co-ops, delivery services and producer/ consumer partnerships. Access to food is even more difficult for people with physical mobility challenges and those who lack the resources to access public transportation. Therefore, a food secure community must enact adequate policies, facilities and programs that allow everyone equal access to food retail outlets.

In a food secure community people are provided with adequate opportunities to attain appropriate **knowledge and skills** to allow them to produce their own foods, identify healthy food choices and prepare foods safely. Schools are a key partner in helping youth builds their knowledge and skills around food production, food choices and preparation. In a food secure community, people have **adequate growing, storage, preparation and cooking facilities** to handle and prepare foods that they purchase or produce. Thus, in a food secure community there is sufficient space and enough resources to ensure that all individuals have access to all of these facilities.

Another determinant of food security is **time**. When people lack time to go grocery shopping or prepare meals, they often rely heavily on over-processed, less nutritious foods. In a food secure community, **social supports** are available to assist individuals in growing, buying, preparing and eating food. Preparing and eating food is often a social activity. Social isolation can lead to loss of appetite or reluctance to cook and prepare meals. Without social supports many parents, especially lone parents, find it difficult to go shopping because they do not have anyone to care for their children.

Is Nova Scotia a Food Secure Province?

The short answer to the question is 'no.' There are many indications that Nova Scotia has much work to do to ensure that current and future generations will be able to get all of the healthy food they need and are able to enjoy it with friends and family.

A Closer Look at Food Supply Issues

Two of the most obvious signs of food insecurity in the Atlantic Region have been the collapse of the cod fish stocks in certain regions^{8,9} and the overall decline in the number of farms in the country^{10,11} and province.^{12,13} Farmers throughout Canada are struggling for viability due to a number of issues including increased operating costs, and trade issues related to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (B.S.E.).^{11,14,15} Recent statistics show that farm net incomes in Nova Scotia in both 2002 and 2003 were negative,¹⁶ with slight increases in 2004. Within Canada, farm families have lower than average family incomes than the general Canadian population in terms of total income. These trends have led to fewer but bigger farms within Canada. This is a concern as data show that big farms may be more harmful to the environment.¹⁷

Some farming practices result in soil erosion, and soil erosion rates in Nova Scotia have also been averaging slightly more than the acceptable level^{III} with some fields experiencing losses of 20 tonnes or more of soil per hectare each year.¹⁸ High levels of soil erosion break down soil structure and do not allow for the natural process of soil regeneration to occur thus decreasing the yield of crops grown.¹⁹ Use of herbicides has increased by 11.5% from 1996 to 2000,^{20, 21} which is cause for concern about the potential of these substances to enter drinking water supplies and to harm aquatic habitats. In addition to this, some fishing practices are harmful to the environment. For example, 54% of ground fish in Atlantic Canada are caught using dragnets,²² which are believed to cause great damage to the ocean floor and the natural habitats of many aquatic life forms.^{23, 24}

Recent census data show that the number of farms in Nova Scotia decreased by almost 300 between 1996 and 2001, which indicates that not only is our environment being compromised, but that there are fewer farms within communities through which residents can buy their foods locally. The ability to buy food within close proximity is related to food prices, accessibility, transportation and the time involved in accessing food, all of which are determinants of food access and supply.

Increasing local food commerce could address some of these determinants of food security for the province through improved producer viability, increasing the quantity, quality and value of food available, supporting the development of alternatives to the conventional grocery store and increasing accessible and diverse food acquisition options. At the same time, decreasing the distance food travels will result in reduced air pollution and carbon emissions.²⁵ In Nova Scotia, opportunities for direct marketing between farmers, fishers and

II BSE, known as "mad cow disease", is a progressive, fatal disease of the central nervous system of cattle. In recent years several cases have been reported to exist in cattle in Canada, which had led to the closure of the United States and several other foreign borders starting in 2003 and ending in late 2005 and early 2006 to beef imports from Canada.

III Losses of 6 tonnes/hectare/year are considered tolerable even though the natural rate of soil regeneration is only 0.5 to 1.0t/hs/year.

consumers have not been fully realized. The goal can only be achieved through shared vision, creativity and collaboration between government, food system stakeholders, and both large-volume buyers and individual customers. Capturing these opportunities requires the development of marketing, business management and production tools and expertise; strategies such as horizontal or vertical alliances and value relationships; and raising awareness through promotion and recognition of consumer demands in the market. These opportunities will lead to satisfying the market demands from those who are not food secure. The modern food industry regularly uses marketing strategies to effectively persuade consumers to buy highly processed, ready to eat food in order to maintain their busy lifestyle.²⁶ Nova Scotians are not immune to this advertising, which does not provide information about potential negative health implications of regularly eating highly processed foods, including increased risk for many chronic diseases.

Food Advertising

More money is spent on advertising for processed foods and junk foods than for nutritious foods or healthy choices. In the United States, the food industry spends more than \$33 *billion* a year to advertise products that are mostly loaded with fat, salt and sugar.

At the same time, the American National Cancer Institute spends \$1 *million* per year to encourage people to eat fruits and vegetables. In Canada, most food advertising on children's TV shows is for fast foods, soft drinks, candy and pre-sweetened cereals, while commercials for healthy food make up only 4% of those shown. Obesity rates for children have tripled since the mid 1980's.

Adapted from: Media Awareness Network, www.media-awareness.ca, accessed 07/07/06

A Closer Look at Food Access Issues

In Nova Scotia, we have a relatively inexpensive food supply when compared to other parts of Canada and the world. The average Canadian spends only 11.1% of their disposable income on food,²⁷ yet 17% of Nova Scotians, or approximately 133,000 people,²⁸ lack the financial resources to purchase healthy food in sufficient quantities. Lone mothers are among those most at risk of experiencing food insecurity in this province. A study completed with 141 low-income lone mothers in the Atlantic Provinces noted that within a one-month study period, 51.5% of the lone mothers from Nova Scotia reported experiencing food insecurity compared to 22.6% in New Brunswick and 33.3% in Newfoundland.²⁹ Most experts agree that the available evidence on financial resources and access to food most likely underestimates the actual extent of the problem, and surveys often miss the groups of people most vulnerable to food insecurity, such as homeless people, aboriginal people living on reserve, people without telephones, those who are transient and those in more remote areas. Income is a major determinant of food security. Unfortunately, income inequities are unacceptably high within Nova Scotia. Recent reports from the National Council of Welfare show that 15.8% of the provincial population or close to 144,000 Nova Scotians live in poverty. Poverty is over three times higher for lone mothers, at 48.8%.³⁰

Income related food insecurity in Nova Scotia has been primarily linked to an inadequate minimum wage and income assistance rates. Food costing data collected in 2002 and again in 2004/05 showed that when the cost of a nutritious diet was put into the context of the cost of basic living expenses, many Nova Scotians (especially those relying on income assistance or minimum wage work) could not afford to buy the food they needed to support their own or their family's health and well-being.^{31,32,33} In 2002, a family of four^{IV} earning minimum wage with one parent working full-time and one part-time was short \$342.10 each month when the cost of a nutritious diet was considered along with other basic expenses.^{31,32} The situation has worsened since 2002, due to inadequate

increases in minimum wage and income assistance, as well as the increasing costs of basic needs. Even with the recent increase in minimum wage to \$7.15/hr 2004/05 food costing data indicate that this same family would be short \$427.93 each month when the cost of a nutritious diet was considered along with other basic expenses³³. Similarly a lone mother with two children earning minimum wage in a full-time job would face a deficit of \$373 each month.³³

When monthly costs for food, shelter, and other expenses considered essential for a basic standard of living, are measured against monthly Income Assistance (IA) benefits for a family of four, the 2004/05 food costing findings suggest that this family faced a deficit of over \$380/month. A lone female parent with two children would have faced a deficit of at least \$129.84 after the cost of a basic nutritious diet was factored in if she was dependent on IA. It is clear that even with the recent increases to IA rates, households relying on IA cannot afford a basic nutritious diet. An Atlantic Canadian study showed that food insecure low-income lone mothers tended to skip meals and sacrifice their own nutrition so that their children could eat.^{29,34} Food costing data collected in 2002 also indicated that the cost of a nutritious diet would be a struggle even for families earning \$9.95 per hour, the average call centre wage at the time of the study. Because food is often the most flexible budget item,³⁵ those who do not have enough income to meet their basic needs are often forced to sacrifice their food budget to pay other bills.

In addition to the lack of resources to access food in Nova Scotia, there is also an inadequate transportation system to allow people who do not own cars to access grocery stores. This means they may have to shop at more expensive convenience stores that usually offer higher priced, lower quality food.

IV Within the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, Family Resource Centres/Projects and Nova Scotia Nutrition Council food costing reports, the reference family of four consisted of two adults and two children, a boy 13 and a girl 7 years of age.

V In the AHPRC, FRC/P and NSNC 2004 report, this represents a household consisting of a lone mother working for minimum wage and her two children, a boy 7 and a girl 4 years of age.)

Communities in Action²

In the early 1990's a group in Halifax, Nova Scotia came together to learn about food costing and comparing food costs between stores and brands. They went out and priced food in their community and realized that the grocery store in their neighborhood charged more for the same foods as a store that was farther away in a wealthier neighborhood. They sent letters and spoke to their store manager. In the end the grocery store in their neighborhood improved its pricing practices and opened a bulk-food section that offered lower cost foods!

Participatory Food Costing²

The Food Security Projects used participatory food costing to examine the cost and affordability of a nutritious diet in Nova Scotia in 2002 and again in 2004/05. Participatory approaches aim to support active involvement of the people most involved, affected or potentially affected by an issue.

Partners from collaborating Family Resource Centres/Projects throughout Nova Scotia, were trained to use a tool called the National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB) to do food costing. The "Food Basket", developed by Health Canada, includes a list of 66 foods representing a *basic* nutritious diet. The NNFB has been used to estimate the costs and affordability of feeding four different family types in Nova Scotia, as well as the costs for 23 different age and gender groups, including pregnant and breastfeeding women.

In 2006 the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection approved and funded a model of annual provincial participatory food costing.

Reports indicate that the school environment has a great deal of influence over children's food choices.³⁶ The current lack of training available within post secondary institutions in Nova Scotia for teachers around family studies and home economics³⁷ may greatly affect the food preparation skills and nutrition knowledge children have when they leave school. The new Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools, released in 2006, offers promise as a first step in addressing food security concerns within schools. However, the policy is only one key step of many that must be taken to promote food security in this setting. Much support and dedication will be required by all key stakeholders for the policy to be successfully implemented.

Food Security is Not About Personal Choice

Food security is much more than an issue of personal choice. Unless people have access to healthy food through the food supply or through their own personal production, strategies aimed at encouraging Nova Scotians to develop healthy food habits will have very limited impact. Until recently, most efforts to promote healthier eating in Nova Scotia have focused on influencing individual choice, without considering the complexity of the issue. With the release of *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia* there is a commitment by healthy eating stakeholders, the Nova Scotia Government and partners to address food security through policy and systems change. Research has shown that focusing only on personal choice can actually have a negative impact. Because campaigns focusing on personal choice are less effective with lower income populations who have fewer options to choose from, they tend to increase the health gap between the rich and poor.³⁸

Schoolyard Vegetable and Fruit Gardens

Gaspereau Valley and Dr. Arthur Hines Elementary Schools in Nova Scotia are two examples of schools using experiential education to teach nutrition, while providing healthy snacks for school lunches. At Gaspereau Valley Elementary, the schoolyard garden project is a combination of a garden and kitchen program that gets students involved in the food system right from planning the garden and planting the seeds to preparing lunches for each other. The *students* use the harvested food to prepare healthy snacks. Engaging in the garden, students are gaining valuable knowledge and skills about food production, preparation and appreciation. Teachers can also use the garden to teach students about math, ecology, sensory evaluation, sociology, life skills, culture and community engagement.

Adapted from Gaspereau Valley Elementary School, Organic Schoolyard Garden Project, May, 2005.

Why We Care About Food Security

Every Nova Scotian concerned about the health and well-being of the people in the province needs to be concerned about food security. As emphasized in *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia*, food security affects, and is affected by, important areas of our lives including our families, economy, environment, communities and our health. We all need to take action to strengthen food security in Nova Scotia to ensure that we have a strong and sustainable food system and healthy population now and in the future.

When all the food security determinants related to food supply and access are considered, it is clearly an agricultural, environmental, economic, transportation, education and social justice issue. It transcends all governmental departments and boundaries. Achieving the goal of food security in Nova Scotia will require addressing all of the social, economic and political forces that influence food security.

Low Income Nova Scotians

The participatory food costing conducted in Nova Scotia in 2004/05 revealed that it costs about **\$617/month** to feed a family with two parents and two children a very basic but nutritious diet; an increase of almost 8% since 2002. For a single mother with two children, it costs about **\$386/month**³³. The cost is higher in rural areas compared with urban areas. Put into the context of basic living, these data sets and previous analyses³¹ showed that Nova Scotians earning minimum wage or on income assistance couldn't afford to purchase a nutritious diet and meet their basic needs, placing their health at risk.

Food Security for: Our Families

Food insecurity affects both the physical and emotional health of people and families. Food insecurity can be very stressful. Studies have shown that parents can be anxious about having enough food for their children and being able to give them good food so they can grow up strong and healthy.³⁹ Some parents worry all day about whether there is enough food for dinner and the next day. Low-income lone mothers have also reported feeling judged, degraded, guilty, isolated, dependent and despondent as a consequence of food insecurity. Parents who are food insecure are also not able to model healthy eating habits for their children,⁴⁰ which is concerning for the health and well being of future generations. Further to this, parents are right to be concerned about whether their children have enough good food because poor nutrition in childhood can have lifetime affects that impact the development of both the body and the mind.⁴¹

Food Security for: Our Communities

Equity, social justice and inclusion are part of the web of factors that support healthy communities. Equity and social justice result when people are treated fairly, when everyone in the community has opportunities to live a sustained and healthy life, and when the community works together to ensure optimal health for everyone. In a healthy community, people can earn a living that allows them to obtain the food they need in a personally acceptable manner. A healthy community is a place where people feel connected to each other and feel they are a part of the community.

The decline of primary sector (agriculture and fishing) economies has had a negative impact on the population of rural and coastal Nova Scotia. Considering that only 10% of farmers are under the age of 35, and 35% are over the age of 55 years, there is great concern about who will grow our food in the future.⁴² The decline in primary sector economies has also forced many people to leave the province to pursue a livelihood elsewhere.

Food insecurity can also lead to crime⁴³ when people are driven to steal or sell drugs to avoid hunger or homelessness. Food insecurity can lead to feelings that our neighbourhoods are not safe, healthy or comfortable places to live.

Food Security for: Our Economy

Canada has a concentrated food retail sector with five retail food chains sharing over 80% of food retail sales.⁴⁴ This creates a disadvantage for local economies because small, community-based businesses - especially small grocers, farmers and fishers - are squeezed out by large scale businesses owned by people outside Nova Scotia and Canada. As a result, the money we spend on food does not remain in our communities.

When local jobs are lost, people have to travel farther outside their community to find work, resulting in less money for food. These issues have been compounded by the rising cost of fuel in recent months.⁴⁵ High costs of transportation result in less money available for families to purchase groceries. Elevated fuel prices increase the farmer's costs and translates into higher food prices for the consumer.

Food Security for: Our Environment

Some food production, processing and transportation methods are not consistent with a vision of a sustainable food system - producing food that will last into the future and ensure that our children will have the food they need. Methods for growing and gathering food can affect the environment in many ways. For example, in some areas fish stocks are depleted, quality agricultural land is being lost to urban development,^{46,47} and pesticides and bacteria like E. Coli threaten to contaminate our water supplies. These are just a few examples of how some human activities harm the environment and compromise food security. To ensure sustainable food systems for the future, we need planning and policies that protect our land, water and other resources.

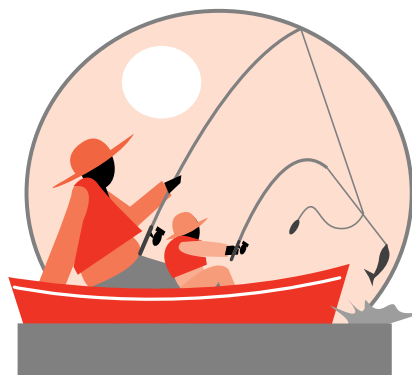
New Brunswick Taking Action

The provincial government in New Brunswick decided to allow parents on income assistance to receive the usual income assistance allowances for themselves and their children AND receive their child tax benefits from the federal and provincial governments. A study that looked at food insecurity among low-income lone mothers in Atlantic Canada found that mothers in New Brunswick were the least likely to experience food insecurity. The mothers who participated in Nova Scotia were three times more likely to experience food insecurity.²⁹

Food Security for: Our Health

Several links have been made between food insecurity and poor physical health.^{48,49} People who are food insecure tend to have poor or fair self rated health.^{50,51} They are more likely than food secure people to have reduced physical activity, suffer from multiple chronic conditions and report having heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and food allergies. The psychological impacts of food insecurity on individuals and households have also been well documented.⁵² A recent Nova Scotia study found that food insecure women who were care-givers experienced much stress related to providing food for themselves and their households.⁵³

A healthy environment, healthy economy, healthy community, and healthy families all contribute to our health as individuals and as a population. All of these factors affect our ability to get the food we need, now and into the future. If these aspects of our lives are put at risk, so is our health and well-being.



What We Can Do to Increase Food Security in Nova Scotia^{VI}

Food insecurity in Nova Scotia is a major issue affecting the health and well-being of our population. Making changes to ensure food security will require the involvement of many people, many organizations and all levels of governments in multiple strategies. Strategies to address food insecurity can be classified into three different levels within a continuum:^{54,55}

1. Short term relief: for emergency situations
2. Individual and/or community capacity building: to produce and prepare food and to bring people together and work for change
3. System change: influencing policy to build food security

Short Term Relief Strategies

Food banks, soup kitchens, and children's feeding programs are directed at those who are the most food insecure and provide short-term relief for the immediate issue of hunger. Despite the important role these programs provide in preventing hunger, these strategies are considered 'Band-Aids'. They help address the problem for the short term but do little to address the underlying problems that cause food insecurity such as inadequate income, inequality and social exclusion and actually 'cover up' the problem.

Food Banks

Diverse groups in our communities including people who are working and retired, students, and people on income assistance or receiving disability support use food banks. The food received from food banks usually only feeds the family for a few days. This food is not always nutritious and occasionally not even edible because it is expired or damaged. Shame is a predominant feeling experienced by food bank users.³¹



VI This section has been adapted from the workbook "Thought About Food?: A Workbook on Food Security and Influencing Policy," www.foodthoughtful.ca.²

Individual and/or Community Capacity Building Strategies

Capacity building strategies help improve food security and the sustainability of the food system by building skills and helping people work together for change. Strategies focused on individual capacity building may include programs where individuals develop skills to grow, produce and prepare their own food. Examples include community gardens or community kitchens. People participating in a community garden develop gardening skills and learn about food production. At the same time, they are producing inexpensive food and contributing to a cleaner environment.

Strategies that build individual skills can also help build communities. Capacities built at the individual level can lead to change at the community level because these programs give people a chance to come together and develop social support networks and plan for collective action. By talking about the issues that affect their food security, people can become excited about making changes and may organize to work together to address issues that affect their food security.

System Change Strategies

Strategies focused on system change aim to make improvements and changes to policy that will build food security. Many of the issues faced by communities or populations can be most effectively addressed through supportive healthy public policy. These strategies are the focus of the next steps outlined in *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia*. Examples of system change strategies include forming and supporting food policy organizations as well as participatory food costing and other types of participatory research on the issue. The Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects, described in Appendix C, are an example of a strategy that is aiming to create system change in order to address food insecurity in Nova Scotia.

Developing healthy public policy requires that the communities *affected* by policy be involved in generating and gathering strong community-based evidence that will

Example of a Nova Scotia Community Skill Building Strategy

In 2005, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) in Halifax, Nova Scotia developed the Urban Garden Mentors Project. This project matches seniors who have gardening experience with volunteers and youth who want to learn about urban food production. This intergenerational, multicultural project draws on the wisdom of older adults and the enthusiasm of young people in a grassroots community development project. At four gardening sites throughout the Halifax peninsula, participants have the opportunity to get outdoors, be physically active and enjoy the great taste of food they have produced themselves.

Ecology Action Centre Project Coordinator Carla Mills. Phone: (902) 429-2202, Email: urbangardens@ecologyaction.ca

The Toronto Food Policy Council

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) partners with business and community groups to develop policies and programs for the promotion of food security. Their goal is a food system that fosters equitable food access, nutrition, community development and environmental health. TFPC's members represent City Council, conventional and organic farmers, food co-ops, large food corporations, multicultural groups, anti-hunger and community development groups. Among their many successes, the Council wrote and championed the City of Toronto Declaration on Food and Nutrition and assisted with fund-raising \$3.5 million for community organizations to increase access to food.

Toronto Food Policy Council, www.toronto.ca/health/tfpc/_index.htm, accessed 07/70/06

support the development of policy. This *participatory approach* is necessary to make the link between public policy and people's every day experiences. For this reason, individual and community capacity building approaches are an essential element in building food security through public policy.

As communities become involved in public policy and gain an understanding of the public policy process they become better equipped to influence the policies that impact their everyday lives, such as food security. Policy and system change can help to build food security as well as stronger, healthier communities, more responsive governments, and improved problem solving on various issues faced by communities. For any of these strategies to be viable, however, all levels of government and all government departments must recognize their roles in addressing and improving food insecurity by supporting and developing healthy public policies that promote food security.

A National, Environmental Scan of Strategies to Address Food Insecurity

The Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects prepared a report that describes strategies used by community, government, and professional groups to influence policy at various levels to build food security. The full report, *A National Environmental Scan of Strategies for Influencing Policy to Build Food Security* can be accessed online at: <http://www.nsnsc.ca/research%20main.htm>.



The Reality of Food Insecurity in Nova Scotia

As a means to introduce how food insecurity exists within the everyday lives of Nova Scotians, four fictitious stories are included in this section to reflect a variety of experiences. We first introduce Alice, a single working mother of two living in Halifax and struggling each day to make ends meet. Next you will meet Dave, an experienced farmer who is feeling the pressure of a changing agricultural industry. Third, we will look at how food insecurity exists in the lives of Michelle and Mike, a middle-income working couple with children. Finally, you will meet George, a widowed senior living in Nova Scotia.

In the stories below, the food access and food supply issues in each of these households is named (in italics and brackets), consistent with the “Determinants of Food Security” model presented on Page 5. In addition, strategies are offered to address the determinants influencing food security.

A Single Parent

Alice is a young single mother of two children, aged four and seven, who works full-time at a minimum wage job in a large department store in Halifax. Alice lives three kilometers from the nearest grocery store. She cannot afford to buy a car so she must take the bus, including one transfer, to get to the grocery store. Often she chooses to walk and take a cart home with her because she finds it too cumbersome to take her children and groceries on and off two buses. For Alice and her children, bus fare, in addition to rising rent and utilities, cuts into her food budget and leads to harder and harder choices. Alice would like to provide her family with more nutritious food, but in order to do so, she would require an additional \$385 each month.^{VII} The challenge is not just about her ability to afford fresh food. Alice would like to take advantage of sales and buy food in quantity, but she doesn't own a freezer. She also finds it hard to find time to cook meals after she finishes work because by the time she rides the bus home and picks up her children at the sitter's it is past 7pm.

What is making Alice food insecure?

- Food Supply issues:
 - There is no grocery store close to Alice's home. (*Diverse and Accessible Retail Options*)
- Food Access issues:
 - An inadequate minimum wage does not allow Alice to purchase the food she needs for the health and well-being of her family. (*Financial Resources*)
 - The absence of affordable and accessible transportation systems gives Alice and her children limited access to food retail outlets. (*Transportation to Food Retail Outlets*)
 - Alice has no long term food storage facility such as a freezer. (*Storage, Preparation and Cooking Facilities*)
 - Alice's hours of work and commuting leave her little time to prepare meals. (*Time and Mobility*)
 - Alice has no one to help her plan and prepare meals. (*Social Support*)

VII Taking into account 2004/05 food costing data, the cost of living in 2006 using the Consumer Price Index, and a minimum wage rate of \$7.15. ³³

What strategies can be undertaken to improve Alice's situation?

- Collaborative planning between all levels of government and across government departments and community organizations is needed to:
- Ensure all Nova Scotians can meet their basic needs (i.e. through adequate income).
- Support healthy eating policies and initiatives in schools.
- Support healthy eating in childcare programs so that it is easier for children to receive nutritious food while in childcare.
- Recognize that work schedules vary (i.e. are not all 9:00-5:00) and adjust the hours of operation for childcare facilities with subsidized spaces to reflect varying work schedules.
- Support the development of community transportation networks to provide shared transportation for people like Alice to improve access to food retail outlets.
- Support the development of community gardens and similar sustainable programs closer to Alice's home.
- Continue to support the local Family Resource Centre to develop a Community Shared Agriculture relationship with local farmers in order to provide families with affordable, fresh, high value food.
- Support the development of community kitchens where parents like Alice can cooperatively buy in bulk, cook together, learn about healthy eating and cooking, as well as prepare several days' meals in advance.

An Experienced Farmer

Dave successfully farmed his land for over thirty years, but is now struggling to make a living from his crops alone. He has grown several different crops for years but due to increased costs of production and decreased margins and revenues he is unable to make enough money to buy the basic necessities for himself and his family. Dave used to be able to sell most of his produce direct to the backdoor of his local supermarket, but now he is unable to do so due to the supermarket's centralized purchasing and distribution policies. Even if Dave had the volume of production to offer the supermarket, the prices he would be offered would not be profitable. Dave's competition used to be the neighbouring farmstead, but now it is large scale, global, industrial food companies that produce low cost food. Dave is facing hard questions about his future. Should he look for a job off-farm? Should he sell the farm? What about retirement? Should he encourage his children to farm?

What is making Dave food insecure?

- Food Supply issues:
 - Dave's farm is too small to compete in selling commodities with the prices and volume of larger, specialized one-crop farms and international competition. (*Producer Viability*)
 - While Dave has always tried to farm in ways that support sustainability some of his competition does not. (*Agricultural and Aquatic Ecosystem Health*)
 - It is extremely difficult for small, individual farms to produce the volume required by the large food retailers. Even if he could, Dave's margins would be extremely thin. (*Price/Value*)
 - There are few independent or small food stores where Dave can sell 'at the back door'. (*Diverse and Accessible Retail Options*)

- Food Access issues:
 - Dave is not making enough money from his farm to be able to provide nutritious food for his own family. (*Financial Resources*)
 - Dave does not know how to change his style of farming into a more profitable use of his resources. (*Knowledge and Skills*)
 - Most of Dave's neighbors have larger, specialized acreages or are non-farmers, so he feels very isolated. (*Social Support*)

What strategies can be undertaken to improve Dave's situation?

- Collaborative planning between all levels of government and across government departments and community organizations is needed to:
 - Support farmers to assess their current business operations and provide opportunities to learn about new ideas and marketing tools, develop business management capacities and training, resolve production management questions through extension and technology transfer services and develop their operations with financial support.
 - Support sustainable farming practices through Environmental Farm and Nutrient Management Planning and research at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College.
 - Support the sector by addressing industry-wide development challenges and developing new markets for Nova Scotia products.
- Support organizations like Atlantic Canada Organic Regional Network (ACORN) to enhance the viability and growth of the organic agricultural community by facilitating information exchange and networking and coordinating informal education for producers.
- Support conventional farmers seeking alternative opportunities, such as certified organic production with extension expertise, a transparent certification process and consumer support.
- Support the development of farmers markets and individual vendors in Nova Scotia through the NS Farmers Market Cooperative and consumer support.
- Support the development of alliances, relationships and cooperatives, which bring smaller producers together to access larger opportunities.

Two Busy Professionals

Michelle and Mike are both busy executives who work long hours in the city and make good salaries. They know that they need to eat healthy food and should spend more time ensuring that their children have nutritious meals and snacks, but they never seem to be able to find the time to shop for groceries or to prepare meals from scratch. Michelle stops for fast food on the way home several nights each week and on weekends she uses convenience foods to put together meals that require little preparation time. Mike gives their children a generous allowance and admonishes them not to waste it on junk food, and to make sure that they eat well on the days when Mom and Dad are late getting home.

What is making Michelle and Mike food insecure?

- Michelle and Mike know that they should provide nutritious food for their family, but they also assume that their children will make the right choices. (*Marketing and Advertising*)
- Food Supply issues:
 - Easily accessible fast food outlets have limited healthy menu choices to offer Michelle and Mike. (*Quality/Quantity of Food Products*)
- Food Access issues:
 - Michelle and Mike's children may not have the necessary knowledge to choose and prepare nutritious food. (*Knowledge and Skills*)
 - Michelle and Mike are not able to take time from their busy schedules to ensure that they have nutritious food and prepare healthy meals. (*Time and Mobility*)
 - Price, convenience, and taste outweigh the recognition within society of the risks of fast food. (*Social Support, Marketing and Advertising*)

What strategies can be undertaken to improve Michelle and Mike's situation?

Collaborative planning between all levels of government and across government departments and community organizations is needed to:

- Ensure that the work week is less demanding and more flexible to the needs of employees.
- Support marketing and advertising campaigns that recognize the need for balanced lives and healthy eating despite the hectic workload that many professionals face.
- Ban advertising that targets children and youth for unhealthy food choices.
- Encourage the development of healthy menu items at fast food outlets.
- Reintroduce or maintain Home Economics programs in schools to help children learn how to plan and cook healthy meals.

An Older Widower

George, a recent widower, is an older man living just outside of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia in the house that he used to share with his wife and family. He is on a fixed income that does not allow him to purchase many 'extras'. He is finding budgeting particularly difficult since the cost of electricity and heating oil increased in recent years. George has just begun learning how to cook for himself as his late wife used to prepare all the meals for the family. He is also finding this difficult because he has little access to information to assist him in this task. George's neighbor provides a drive into New Glasgow to the grocery store every week for grocery shopping. George feels fortunate for this because his tight budget would not allow him to hire a cab to drive him both ways. He finds it challenging to shop for groceries because the new grocery stores are so large it is very tiresome for him to walk around them and find what he needs.

What is making George food insecure?

- Food Supply issues:
 - George only has the option of shopping at a larger grocery store in which he finds it difficult to walk around and find needed items. (*Diverse and Accessible Retail Options*)
- Food Access issues:
 - George is on a fixed income that limits the types of food he can purchase and the transportation he can access to travel to and from the grocery stores. (*Financial Resources*)
 - There are no transportation systems available, at an acceptable cost, which will allow George the freedom to go to and from the grocery store when he needs to. (*Transportation to Food Retail Outlets*)
 - George has few cooking and food preparation skills and is unable to access assistance to increase these skills. (*Knowledge and Skills*)
 - Although George's neighbor provides weekly transportation, George needs support during meal times and throughout the rest of the week to go grocery shopping. (*Social Supports*)

What strategies can be undertaken to improve George's situation?

Collaborative planning between all levels of government and across government departments and community organizations is needed to:

- Ensure seniors' incomes allow them to cover the basic costs of living and consider the extra expenses some seniors encounter because of physical and/or cognitive impairments.
- Provide more affordable and accessible transportation services to grocery stores for all individuals, including seniors.
- Enact policies that encourage grocery stores to consider seniors, and other groups who have limited physical mobility, when designing stores.
- Develop and implement food preparation courses/classes in collaboration with seniors and others.

- Develop and implement gardening courses/classes in collaboration with seniors for seniors.
- Increase awareness of and access to programs/services for seniors such as Meals on Wheels and congregate dining programs.
- Provide information and planning courses/classes on Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan, and Guaranteed Income Supplement to better enable adults and seniors to plan for future financial security.
- Protect smaller grocery businesses from corporate mergers and support more farmers' markets and smaller shopping venues as alternatives to large grocery stores.
- Ensure equitable grocery prices between larger and smaller, and urban and rural stores.



Part 2:

Food Security Policy Lens



The Food Security Policy Lens

The first part of this document described food security and the many complex factors that determine whether or not a community, family or individual is food secure. Part two provides policy and decision makers with a tool called a Food Security Policy Lens. It provides a **set of questions to support critical analysis and discussion about the direct and indirect impacts of policy and program decisions on food security.**

How To Use the Lens

The lens can be used in the early stages of policy or program planning and review. Reflection on and discussion about the questions in the lens will help to inform the process of decision making to reduce negative impacts on food security or enhance positive impacts.

To assess how a potential policy or program decision impacts on the food security of Nova Scotians, reflect on the answers to the questions below. A copy of these questions is contained on a worksheet in Appendix D.

1. Has the policy or program decision been developed in collaboration with those who will be most affected by the decision?
2. Does the policy or program decision address the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of vulnerable sub-groups within Nova Scotia, including those who live on low income, small farmers and fishers?

3. Does the policy or program decision impact the Food Supply determinants of food security, defined in Part One: Understanding Food Security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

Food supply determinants of food security are:

- Agricultural & Aquatic Ecosystem Health
- Producer Viability
- Price, Value & Wage
- Processing/infrastructure
- Quality/Quantity of Food Products
- Diverse & Accessible Retail Options
- Marketing & Advertising

4. Does the policy or program decision impact the Food Access determinants of food security, defined in Part One: Understanding Food Security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

Food Access determinants of food security are:

- Financial Resources
- Transportation to Food Retail Outlets
- Knowledge & Skills
- Growing, Storage, Preparation & Cooking Facilities
- Time
- Social Support

5. Are there any changes that can be made to the program or policy decision to reduce potential negative impacts or increase potential positive impacts on food security? What are the changes?

Finding Your Role in Achieving Food Security

Everyone has a role in building food security, and the Food Security Policy Lens is meant to support decision making that improves food security. For example, it could be used to inform efforts to increase access to nutritious foods for all Nova Scotians. However, not all examples of the Policy Lens in action are as obvious. It could also be useful in making policy or program decisions around:

- Social Marketing
- Land zoning
- Taxation
- Public transportation
- Marine protection
- Social assistance rates and minimum wages

- Organizational policies on flexible working hours
- Trade regulations
- Advertising and marketing laws
- Pesticide bylaws
- Wheelchair accessibility policies
- Long term care facilities
- Education access and curriculum
- ... and many more!

If you are still unclear about how the Food Security Policy Lens pertains to your work, the following section gives a clear example of how municipal officials working on a *public transportation* issue directly affected the food security of public transit users in their community.

The Food Security Policy Lens in Action: An Example

The following is a fictitious scenario that uses the Food Security Policy Lens to consider the impact of a policy decision on the food security of Nova Scotians. The scenario is presented, followed by two potential policy decisions along with an analysis of each decision using the Food Security Policy Lens. The scenario presents a policy issue that at first glance does not appear to be connected to food security. By using the Food Security Policy Lens, it becomes clear that the issue is significantly related to food security, and subsequently the health of Nova Scotians.

The Scenario

Municipal officials are faced with the issue of increased operating costs of the public transit system. During the last few years the number of residents who use the bus has not increased but operating costs have risen, largely due to the rising costs of fuel. At the regular monthly council meeting, staff presents the councilors with their carefully analyzed financial data that show the projected deficit for the coming year and the required amount of revenue required to break even. At this meeting, the councilors must make a decision on the steps required to ensure that the public transit system is sustainable into the future.

Policy Option 1

The council decides that the municipality will increase the fare for public transit by 10% to offset the increased costs of operation.

Analysis Using the Policy Lens

1. Has the policy or program decision been developed in collaboration with those who will be most affected by the decision?

This policy decision was made with the input of staff of the municipality and the elected councilors. Involvement of the people who ride the bus on a daily or occasional basis would have been helpful to gain more insights.

2. Does the policy or program decision address the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of vulnerable sub-groups within Nova Scotia, including those who live on low income, small farmers and fishers?

Because this policy decision was made without the input of the people who use the public transit system, there is no way of knowing what impact the policy would have on the lives of regular transit users. It would be really helpful if there were data available to tell us how many transit users would be affected and how, particularly for low income users.

3. Does the policy or program decision impact the Food Supply determinants of food security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

This policy decision does not appear to impact the food supply determinants. However, advertising space on buses can be used to raise awareness about the importance of local food production and access to healthy foods for all.

4. Does the policy or program decision impact the Food Access determinants of food security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

The policy decision negatively impacts financial accessibility for lower income transit users. If taking the bus costs more, there can be fewer trips to the grocery store. In addition, there may be less money for food if bus travel is essential (e.g., to go to work). This policy may also negatively impact the determinant of 'time' for some transit users. If they can no longer afford to take the bus, they will have to walk more and will have reduced time to cook meals at home.

5. Are there any changes that can be made to the program or policy decision to reduce potential negative impacts or increase potential positive impacts on food security? What are the changes?

More information needs to be collected about the demographics of transit users. Perhaps there could be a strategy for a staggered fare based on ability to pay (e.g., rebates or discounts for low income users, students and seniors).

Policy Option 2

Use of the policy lens early in discussions about public transit policy changes has led decision-makers to hold community consultations to obtain transit user input on the problem. Based on the results of community consultations held over the past two months, it was decided that four changes will be made to certain routes, and schedules will be altered for many routes in an effort to increase the number of people using the public transit system.

Analysis Using the Policy Lens

1. Has the policy or program decision been developed in collaboration with those who will be most affected by the decision?

The policy option to increase the number of riders using the system rather than increasing fares was developed based on the results of consultations that indicated there are specific problems with routes and schedules that reduce use of the system.

2. Does the policy or program decision address the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of vulnerable sub-groups within Nova Scotia, including those who live on low income, small scale farmers and fishers?

The decision to consult the riders of the service was made in part to help decision-makers better understand the sub-population will be further disadvantaged.

3. Does the policy or program decision impact the Food Supply determinants of food security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

This policy decision may positively impact the 'agricultural and aquatic ecosystem' determinant of food security. Encouraging more people to ride the bus has the potential to cut down on air pollution from multiple cars. During the consultation, some people suggested that they would use the farmers' market if there was a bus stop located there.

4. Does the policy or program decision impact the Food Access determinants of food security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

The policy decision positively impacts the 'time' determinant of food security for some people, since the route changes will result in a shorter walk home from the bus stop. The policy decision may positively impact the 'transportation to food outlets' determinant due to route changes that include a bus stop at the community farmers' market.

5. Are there any changes that can be made to the program or policy decision to reduce potential negative impacts or increase potential positive impacts on food security? What are the changes?

The route schedule changes will be implemented for six months and re-evaluated at that time to see if the changes are supporting people's needs and to determine the impact on operating costs.

Appendices



Appendix A: Policy Consultation Departments

Nova Scotia Department of Education

Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture

Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection

Nova Scotia Department of Community Services

Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority

Capital District Health Authority Public Health Services

Appendix B:

Staff & Policy Working Group

Staff

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Kim Barro Capital District Health Authority

Jamey Coughlin. NS Department of Agriculture

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Lynn Langille. Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre

Chris Aucoin Feed Nova Scotia

Brian Ives. Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network

Cathy Kay NS Department of Community Services

Trudy Reid. Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre, Amherst, NS

Appendix C:

The Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects

Since 2000, participatory research addressing food security in Nova Scotia has involved many different activities and studies which have been guided by a core group of partners working collectively under the umbrella of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects. This work has addressed four important questions about food security:

1) How much does a basic nutritious diet cost in Nova Scotia? _____

In 1988, the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council (NSNC) conducted a study to find the cost of a basic nutritious diet in Nova Scotia and showed that people living on a low income could not afford to eat nutritiously. In 2000 partners of the Participatory Food Security Projects recognized the urgent need to update this information to help inform policy and to build capacity to address the root causes of food insecurity. Together with staff and participants of collaborating Family Resource Centres and Projects, food costing research was conducted in each region of the province. The outcome was two-fold: an overview of what it costs to eat nutritiously in Nova Scotia and a group of trained food costers with the commitment and interest to continue to work together to build food security. The partners subsequently repeated participatory food costing in the fall of 2004 and spring of 2005 and released a report on the findings in June of 2006. The partners also conducted a study on food costing initiatives across Canada, as well as consultations with stakeholders on food costing in Nova Scotia. With this information the partners developed a model for ongoing participatory food costing in Nova Scotia which was subsequently approved and funded to support annual participatory food costing in Nova Scotia. As of the time of the printing of this document, Nova Scotia was the only province to use participatory research approaches for food costing.

2) What is life like for people who don't have enough nutritious food? _____

Many people who participated in the 2002 food costing projects knew from personal experience that the cost of a nutritious diet was too high for many people to afford. They thought that capturing stories of people's experiences dealing with food insecurity, along with the food costing data, could provide powerful evidence for advocating for policy change that would build food security. The stories would also allow Nova Scotians to gain a better understanding of the reality of living with food insecurity. In 2002, food costers and others came together in 'story sharing workshops' across Nova Scotia to share their experiences about what life is like for people facing food insecurity. They worked together to think about what food insecurity meant to them, to identify the problems, what causes these problems, how food insecurity affected them and their families, as well as to decide what needed to be done to address food insecurity in Nova Scotia.

3) What is being done to deal with food insecurity and to build long-term solutions?

The food costing research and the story sharing workshops helped identify both problems and solutions in government policy. This research highlighted the need to find ways to immediately address people's food insecurity and look for effective long-term solutions. To address this gap, people working on food security issues across Canada were asked to share their experiences with trying to influence policy. A national advisory committee was formed and a survey was sent out asking people about the strategies they used to try to change policies related to food security. In depth interviews were conducted with 26 key informants across the country to learn about their experiences in attempting to change policy related to food security. The results of this national 'environmental scan' describe how people have tried to influence policy, what worked, what didn't, what challenges they faced, and what they learned.

4) What more can we do to improve food security?

People working on the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects, including the national partners, were eager to make a difference locally and nationally through policy change. The evidence collected through this research has been used for informing policy and has resulted in a growing commitment to address food insecurity in Nova Scotia and beyond. Using input from individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds through two National Dialogues and a national pilot in 11 diverse communities across Canada, the food security partners created an accessible, plain language, workbook *Thought About Food? A Workbook on Food Security and Influencing Policy* (www.foodthoughtful.ca) to help guide them through dialogues about food security within their communities. Currently in Nova Scotia and across Canada, people are working toward finding solutions for the food security issues most important to their communities through Community Dialogues. Food security mentors, affiliated with the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP), have used the workbook in nine provinces and two territories to develop community-based action plans to build food security through local level policy change across the country. They have also adapted the workbook into French language and worked with others across the country to develop a DVD to complement the Workbook called *Food Security: It's Everyone's Business*. The partners in Nova Scotia and across Canada — professionals, community-based programs such as CAPC and CPNP and other community-based organizations, policy-makers and academic researchers across different sectors — continue to generate practice-based evidence and action on food insecurity to build upon these accomplishments.

Appendix D:

Food Security Policy Lens Worksheet

Food Security Policy Lens Worksheet

1. Has the policy or program decision has been developed in collaboration with those who will be most affected by the decisions?

Yes No

Comments:

.....

.....

2. Does the policy or program decision address the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of vulnerable sub groups within Nova Scotia, including those who live on low income, and those who produce our food including small farmers and fishers?

Yes No

Comments:

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3. Does the policy or program decision impact the **Food Supply** determinants of food security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?.....

Food Supply determinants of food security are:

- Agricultural & Aquatic Ecosystem Health Yes No
- Producer Viability Yes No
- Price, Value & Wage Yes No
- Processing/infrastructure Yes No
- Quality/Quantity of Food Products Yes No
- Diverse & Accessible Retail Options Yes No
- Marketing & Advertising Yes No

Comments:

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4. Does the policy or program decision impact the **Food Access** determinants of food security? If yes, is the impact positive or negative?

Food Access determinants of food security are:

- Financial Resources Yes No
- Transportation to Food Retail Outlets Yes No
- Knowledge & Skills Yes No
- Growing, Storage, Preparation & Cooking Facilities Yes No
- Time Yes No
- Social Support Yes No

Comments:

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5. Are there any changes that can be made to the program or policy decision to reduce potential negative impacts or increase potential positive impacts on food security?

Yes No

What are the changes?

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