



Nova Scotia
Nutrition Council

The struggle to feed our families in Nova Scotia: *What does food costing tell us?*

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AHPRC
Atlantic Health
Promotion
Research Centre

What is Participatory Food Costing?

Participatory approaches aim to support active involvement of those most involved, affected or potentially affected by an issue. This Project used participatory research to examine the affordability of nutritious food in Nova Scotia.

People involved in Family Resource Centres/Projects (FRC/Ps) throughout Nova Scotia were involved as food costers in their communities.



Where was this project completed?

In communities throughout all 9 District Health Authorities (DHAs) in Nova Scotia, Canada.



When did the Food Costing Take Place?

Food costing took place during the weeks of June 16th to 22nd and October 21st to 26th, 2002. Spring and fall were chosen as they represent the times of year with the least seasonal variability in food costs.

Who Did the Food Costing?

A total of 54 participants and 18 support people in 21 FRC/Ps throughout the province in partnership with the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council (NSNC) and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC).

Why did we decide to do this project?

The need for food costing in Nova Scotia was determined by the growing concern among the NSNC and individuals in FRC/Ps throughout Nova Scotia. There was a strong sense that the impact of poverty was increasingly being felt and that food needs were commonly going unmet! The need for evidence to support this concern was a motivation for this project. **Food insecurity** is, by definition, "the inability to obtain sufficient, nutritious, personally acceptable food through normal food channels or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so"¹. **Food security** exists when all people at all times can acquire safe, nutritionally adequate and personally acceptable foods that are accessible in a manner maintaining human dignity"².



The reasons for the concern about food insecurity can be clearly understood when we examine the following statistics....

- 18.4% of urban and 17.7% of rural Nova Scotian residents live in poverty³
- 17% of Nova Scotians experience some form of food insecurity⁴
- 1 in 5 children in NS live in poverty⁵
- NS has one of the lowest minimum wage rates in the country at \$6.25/hr⁶
- Over 18,000 NS citizens were assisted by a food bank in March 2002⁷

Lone mothers from NS were 3.3 times more likely than those from other Atlantic Provinces to experience food insecurity⁸. There was speculation that this was associated with the child-tax benefit supplement 'claw-back' that was made by the NS government at the time of this study⁸.

¹Davis, B. & Tarasuk, V. (1994) Hunger in Canada. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 11(4), 50-57

² Canadian Dietetic Association. (1991) Hunger and food security in Canada: Official position of the Canadian Dietetic Association, *Journal of the Canadian Dietetic Association* 52(3), 139.

³Lee, K. (2000). Urban Poverty in Canada: A statistical profile. Canadian Council Social Development.

⁴Statistics Canada. (2001) Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) Cycle 1.1.

⁵ Campaign 2000 (2002). Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card 2001: A National Disgrace. Retrieved May23, 2003 from the World Wide Web <http://www.campaign2000.ca/rc/pdf/NSchildpoverty01.pdf>

⁶ Nova Scotia Office of Environment and Labour (2003). Retrieval at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20030410003>. Minimum wage will increase to \$6.50 on April 1, 2004.

⁷ Wilson, B. & Tsoa, E. (2002) Hunger Count 2002. Eating their words: Government failure on food security. Canadian Association of Food Banks: Toronto

⁸McIntyre, L., Glanville, T., Officer, S. & Anderson, B. (2002). Food insecurity of low-income lone mothers and their children in Atlantic Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 93(6): 411-415.

What Does Food Costing Tell Us?

What is the National Nutritious Food Basket?

The food costers used a tool called the *National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB)*⁹ to determine the costs of a nutritious food basket across the province. The "Food Basket" includes a list of 66 foods that can be used to estimate how much it costs to purchase a "bare bones" nutritious diet. The foods included are based upon both current food purchasing patterns of Canadian households and Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. The NNFB can be used to estimate the weekly cost of feeding a reference family of four, as well as the weekly cost for 23 different age and gender groups including pregnant and lactating women.

How Much Does it Cost in Nova Scotia to Purchase a Nutritious Diet for my Family?

Using the table entitled *Weekly Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket in Nova Scotia by Age and Gender Groups (2002)* on the next page we can quickly estimate how much it should cost to feed our families and ourselves a nutritious diet. Lets assume...:

Family "X" consists of:

Mother: female between 25 and 49 years

Father: between 25 and 49 years

Two children: A girl aged 7 and a boy 14.

Follow the steps on the opposite side of the page to find out how much a nutritious food basket costs for one week for Family X! Go through the steps again substituting the members of your family to find how much it costs for your family to eat nutritiously.



Step 1: Write down the ages and sex of all the people you are feeding

Using Family X ...

Mother: female between 25 and 49 years

Father: between 25 and 49 years

Your children: A girl aged 7 and a boy 14.

Step 2: Using the chart on the following page you

can figure out the costs based on the NNFB

Mother:	\$29.39
Father:	\$39.91
Girl aged 7:	\$25.09
Boy aged 14:	<u>\$37.92</u>
Total	\$132.31

Step 3: Since it costs a little more per person to feed small groups of people and a little less to feed larger groups, you may have to adjust the total cost found in Step 2. Using the following adjustment for family size if it applies to your situation.

1 person: increase costs by 15%
(multiply food costs by 1.15)

2 persons: increase costs by 10%
(multiply food costs by 1.1)

3 persons: increase by 5%
(multiply food costs by 1.05)

4 persons: no change

5 persons: decrease food costs by 5%
(multiply food costs by .95)

6 persons: decrease costs by 10%
(multiply food costs by .90)

Step 4: If you want a monthly rate, multiply your weekly rate by **4.33**

(\$132.31 x 4.33 = \$572.90)

⁹Lawn, J. (1998) National nutritious food basket. Health Canada.

So What Did We Find? ...The Cost of Eating Nutritiously In Nova Scotia

Table 1: Weekly Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket in Nova Scotia by Age and Gender

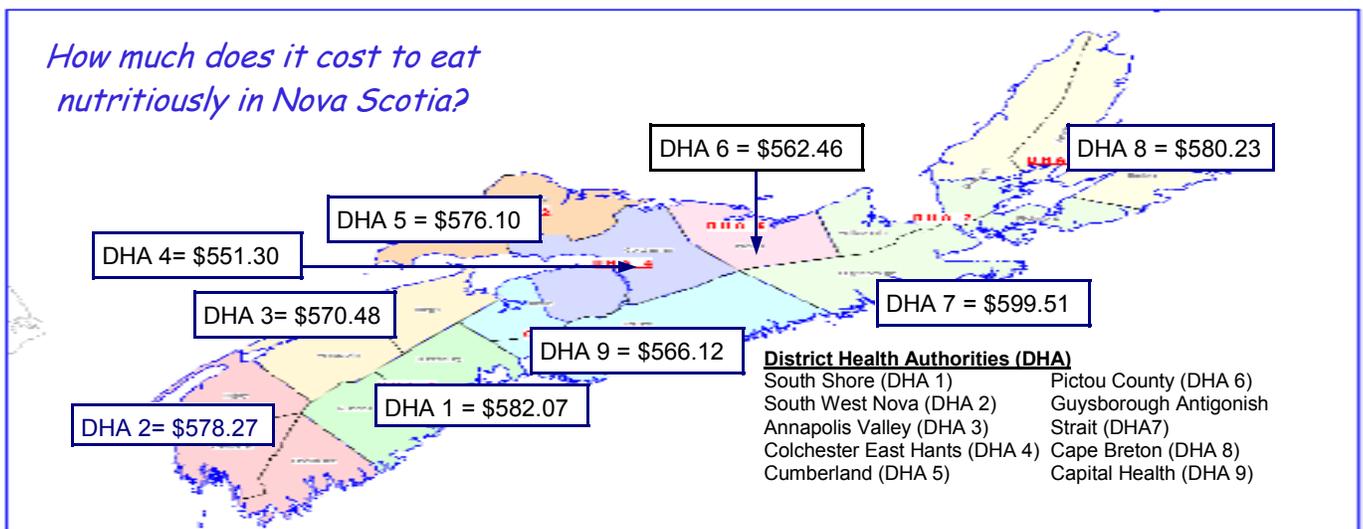
Sex	Age	Cost/wk	Cost/mo
Child	1	\$15.95	\$69.06
	2-3	\$16.67	\$72.18
	4-6	\$21.97	\$95.13
Boy	7-9	\$25.99	\$112.54
	10-12	\$32.36	\$140.12
	13-15	\$37.92	\$164.19
	16-18	\$43.66	\$189.05
Girl	7-9	\$25.09	\$108.64
	10-12	\$30.06	\$130.16
	13-15	\$32.04	\$138.73
	16-18	\$30.17	\$130.64
Man	19-24	\$41.12	\$178.05
	25-49	\$39.91	\$172.81
	50-74	\$36.23	\$156.88
	75+	\$32.86	\$142.28
Woman	19-24	\$30.86	\$133.62
	25-49	\$29.39	\$127.26
	50-74	\$28.87	\$125.01
	75+	28.11	\$121.72

Age of Mother (yrs)	Stage of Pregnancy	Cost/wk	Cost/mo
13-15	Trimester 1	\$35.63	\$154.28
	Trimester	\$37.58	\$162.72
	Lactation	\$38.61	\$167.18
16-18	Trimester 1	\$35.32	\$152.94
	Trimester	\$38.02	\$164.63
	Lactation	\$38.98	\$168.78
19-24	Trimester 1	\$34.47	\$149.26
	Trimester	\$36.67	\$158.78
	Lactation	\$37.49	\$162.33
25-49	Trimester 1	\$33.02	\$142.98
	Trimester	\$35.08	\$151.90
	Lactation	\$35.75	\$154.80

**Based on costs of purchasing a Nutritious Food Basket for individuals shown in each age and gender group. Note that each value is an estimation and may vary based on personal circumstances. These prices do not include such things as toiletries, cleaning supplies, etc.*

So how does your family compare???

The following map shows the average monthly cost of feeding a family of four nutritiously, based on the National Nutritious Food Basket, in each District Health Authority. Although this varies across the province, on average it costs \$572.90/month to feed a reference family of four a nutritious diet in Nova Scotia.



Does the cost of purchasing a nutritious diet differ between large and small stores?



Mega/superstores = **\$553.21/month**
for family of four



Grocery Stores = **\$593.28/month**
for family of four

The average monthly cost of purchasing a nutritious diet for a family of four was significantly lower at mega store/superstores compared with grocery stores.

Conclusions...

What does this tell us?

This project showed that Nova Scotia citizens earning low incomes, such as minimum wage and Income Assistance, cannot afford to eat a healthy diet. This means that many Nova Scotians are unable to meet their basic nutritional needs. This can cause many problems, such as nutritional deficiencies that can lead to many physical, mental, and social complications-not only for those experiencing food insecurity but also for communities and our province as a whole. **All Nova Scotians have a right to meet their basic food needs and to be able to eat a nutritious diet.**

Action needs to be taken by those involved in making policy and by those most affected by policies that impact food security - we need to come together to ensure this is acted on. It is the right of all Nova Scotians to eat a healthy and balanced diet made up of foods they like to eat.



Story Sharing...Beginning to Uncover the Lived Experiences of Food Insecurity

The issues, struggles and reality of food insecurity are often invisible in Nova Scotia. To assist in beginning to understand the reality of the issue and strengthen the food costing data, story-sharing workshops were held around the province with FRC/P participants and workers. Participants shared personal experiences of how food insecurity was present in their daily lives and the affect this had on their families. Some common themes of these stories include:

- Judgement- society often judges those who are food insecure, working poor or on social assistance.
- Food insecurity results in many additional stressors for caregivers/parents.
 - ◆ For example, caregivers/families struggle to provide nutritious food they know is needed for healthy child development
- Children can be greatly affected by the realities of food insecurity. The experiences can stay with them for a lifetime.
- Many emotions are involved with food insecurity such as fear, anger, and hopelessness.
- There are often no supports to assist people in bettering their situation. In other words, many felt that the system is working against them.

Next Steps...

Our work is not over. Now that we have the evidence needed to take action, together we can work to build food security in Nova Scotia.