

**Presentation to the Minister of Finance
and President of Treasury Board
Honorable Tomas M. Marshall**

**Department of Finance
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador**

**Pre-Budget Consultation Submission
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Submitted by the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Food Security in Newfoundland and Labrador

Food Security means that all people, at all times, have physical & economic access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate foods produced in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner. At the core of food security is access to healthy foods and optimal nutrition for all. Food access is intrinsically linked to food supply, and thus food security is dependent on a healthy and sustainable food system.

Newfoundland and Labrador faces many serious challenges related to food insecurity. Research indicates that our province has the nation's highest rate of obesity¹, high rates of chronic disease (including the second highest rate of diabetes²), while paradoxically having the highest rate of Food Bank usage in Canada³. These challenges carry with them an associated economic burden that takes a toll on our capacity for social and economic development.

Newfoundland and Labrador also currently relies greatly on outside food sources, having only approximately 10% of vegetables available through major wholesalers are produced within the province. This dependence on outside food sources leaves our province with a predicted 2-3 day supply of fresh vegetables in the event of a crisis that disrupts this supply system⁴. Not only does this make us vulnerable to food shortages, but it also lengthens the travel time of food, decreasing the fresh food's nutritional content and leading to food spoilage before its arrival at the retail location. We are also facing an aging population of farmers and a decreasing number of active farms in the province.⁵

These factors highlight a few of the challenges that we are currently facing in the province related to food insecurity.

About the Food Security Network of Newfoundland & Labrador (FSN)

FSN is a provincial, non-profit organization initially started in 1998 in response to growing concerns about hunger and poverty in the province. FSN's mission is to actively promote comprehensive, community-based solutions to ensure physical and economic access to adequate and healthy food for all. FSN's 5 priority areas are drawn from recommendations identified at the 2007 provincial Food Security Assembly:

- a. Enhancing communication and information-sharing among organizations that promote food security;
- b. Increasing knowledge and public awareness about food security;
- c. Building inter-sectoral partnerships related to enhancing food security;
- d. Acting as a catalyst for comprehensive and community-based solutions to food security; and
- e. Developing a research base to inform our work.

FSN has maintained a strong track record for accountability and project management. Working in close partnership with many other organizations, FSN has been able to accomplish a great deal in the past few years, even on a limited and often unsure, project-based budget.⁶ Since 2005, FSN has received approximately \$320,000 in funding from federal and provincial sources,

¹ Obesity in Canada, Snapshot. Public Health Agency of Canada, 2009, pg 3.

² Report from the National diabetes Surveillance System: Diabetes in Canada, 2008. Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008, pg.11.

³ Hunger Count 2009, Food Banks Canada, 2009, pg.6.

⁴ Wholesale and Other Opportunities in the Vegetables Industry of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Natural Resources, Forestry, and AgriFoods, May: 2007.

⁵ See attached "A Snapshot of Food Security Issues in Newfoundland and Labrador"

⁶ See attached "Food Security Network Summary of Projects and Funding 2005-2009"

mainly through the Public Health Agency of Canada's Population Health Fund and some through the Provincial Wellness Strategy.

Community-Based Work Supporting Food Security

At the provincial level, FSN has seen significant growth in the number of individuals and organizations across sectors expressing a desire to learn more, be kept up to date, and participate in dialogue and partnerships that promote food security. In the past several years FSN has played a significant role as a catalyst for initiating community discussions and in supporting the resulting action plans. Some programs and initiatives that have resulted from the efforts of FSN include the growing number of, and increasing interest in, among others:

- Community Gardens
- Community Kitchens
- Farmers' Markets
- Bulk Buying Clubs
- Food Security Working Groups
- Community Supported Agriculture Programs
- Buy-Local initiatives
- Community-Led Food Assessments

FSN's past project, 'Put Food First!' which was funded by both the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Provincial Department of Health and Community Services, held capacity building and community dialogue sessions facilitated by FSN in three regions across the province. Each session attracted 40-50 participants and established key actions around food security in each region. Outcomes included:

Bonne Bay South (including 7 communities in the Gros Morne National Park)

- Farmers Markets in Corner Brook, Glenburnie-Birchy Head-Shoal Brook and Norris Point
- Community Gardens
- Kitchen Garden in Norris Point

St. John's, with FEAST (Food Education Action St. John's)

- Urban Food Resolution Working Group
- Institutional Policy Working Group

Labrador, with the Regional Wellness Coalition

- Happy Valley-Goose Bay Food Security Committee
- Labrador West Food Security Committee

People and partners at the community level continue to seek more information, tools and best practices that can assist them in making these efforts effective and sustainable.

FSN's Role in Growing Food Security in NL

FSN has become a powerful catalyst for community-based and solutions-focused dialogue as well as community-led initiatives to address food security. FSN brings to this work a strong, committed volunteer Board of Directors, as well as a varied and growing network of individuals and organizations with interest in food security.

Currently FSN is collaborating with a wide range of national, provincial and local partners in leading two projects. For the first project, FSN is involved in a national food security project that is developing a tool for community-led food assessments in five vulnerable communities across the country. FSN has partnered with the Nunatsiavut Government, as well as many provincial government and community partners, with federal funding from the Public Health Agency of

Canada and the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, to pilot a community-led food assessment in Hopedale with the intent of identifying key food challenges facing communities along the North Coast of Labrador. For this project, FSN is bringing together key partners from many sectors and facilitating dialogue to help guide the successful completion of this important work. Upon completing this project, FSN will have a tool that can assist communities across Newfoundland and Labrador in completing community-led food assessments and developing community food security action and evaluation plans.

With the second project, FSN has been taking measures to develop strategic partnerships, share knowledge to build expertise, and increase public awareness of food security issues in NL. With federal funding from PHAC, FSN has been hosting provincial teleconferences on various topics around food security and has had incredibly high participation rates and positive feedback for these sessions. This is demonstrated by the recent Community Gardening teleconference held on February 4th with 57 registered participants from across the province. Additionally, in November 2009, FSN partnered with the St. John's Farmers' Market to host a provincial Farmers' Market Summit. For this event, FSN brought in a Farmers' Market Expert from Nova Scotia as well as representatives from farmers' markets across NL to St. John's for a daylong visioning session for Farmers' Markets in the province, with funding support from Innovation, Trade, and Rural Development. FSN is also continually growing its stakeholder database which now contains over 400 individuals and organizations across the province and country, who receive the monthly FSN "Food Security E-News Update."

Through this collaborative work, FSN has witnessed a growing interest in food security and is aware of and has worked with communities across the province that are keen to begin community-based work to address their community-specific food security concerns. These communities require funding sources, resources, and networking support to assist in sharing best practices to benefit their work and build sustainable programs. FSN's role is to promote comprehensive, community-based solutions to build food security through supporting communities in assessing their needs and commencing these types of initiatives. In order for FSN to fill this role, sustainable funding is required.

The Cross-Cutting Nature of Food Security

Only through a strong, collaborative and multi-sectoral approach in our province can we ensure that community-based food security initiatives will succeed and become sustainable, and that more citizens and communities will become involved in the effort to build a strong, healthy, and sustainable food system for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The issue of food security is clearly on the agendas of federal, provincial and some municipal government departments and agencies. FSN would like to congratulate the Province on the establishment of the provincial inter-departmental food security committee. We encourage the province to continue to build and utilize this Committee and we look forward to exploring ways FSN can be work with and support the Committee's work.

The time is right to work more collaboratively and strategically, in order to build on all of these strengths, and take effective and measurable action toward the common goal of advancing food security in Newfoundland and Labrador.

FSN looks forward to working with many partners to advance food security in the coming years, and believes strongly that the success of any provincial food security initiative lies in its ability to connect with other sectors and to effectively engage citizens and communities. FSN foresees many opportunities to connect with, and enhance various provincial government initiatives, through strong strategic partnerships with various departments, including those currently sitting on the provincial food security committee. FSN looks forward to meeting with these partners to determine how we can effectively work together to accomplish our common goals.



A Snapshot of Food Security Issues in Newfoundland and Labrador

Themes identified by Participants at the Provincial Food Security Assembly

1. ZERO HUNGER & FOOD AID

Goal: All people at all times must be able to acquire, in a dignified manner, adequate quantity and quality of culturally and personally acceptable and affordable food.

Poverty

- High cost of nutritious food
- Insufficient funds (Income Support/EI/minimum wage) for healthy diet; cheaper (in short run) to buy junk food
- Lack of affordable, safe housing
- High cost of home heating fuel, hydro
- No food banks in some areas
- No transportation to get to food banks or grocery store: can't afford transportation or transportation not available
- Food banks accept and distribute food of lower nutritional value
- Fresh foods and locally grown foods rarely available at food banks

2. SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Goal: (Including agriculture, the fishery, traditional and wild foods) Food in Newfoundland & Labrador must be planted, grown, harvested, caught, processed, and distributed in a manner which maintains and enhances the quality of land, air and water for future generations, and provides people with a living wage in a healthy working environment.

Access to food and food supply

- High price of milk and other staples in isolated communities
- Many communities have no agriculture in or near their community or have only limited access to locally grown food
- Way more demand than supply of local foods; buying local often not an option
- Isolated communities: no grocery stores in some areas; just convenience stores with high prices
- Not enough farmers; not enough new young farmers

- Livestock "industry" used to be much more robust, based more on sheep and goats which are better adapted to environment
- Lack of adequate storage facilities for farmers
- Decline of cod fishery; seasonal food fishery; fish quotas
- Outmigration negatively affecting fishery as viable career

Environmental & land use issues

- New developments/subdivisions: loss of arable land
- Only about 2% of NL land mass is designated for agriculture
- Recreational vehicles, roadsides, dumps, boats, etc.: pollutants, toxins in air, water, soil
- Food miles: How far food is traveling and the carbon emissions caused by that
- We aren't completing the food chain by composting, so food wastes are not returning to the soil

2. HEALTHY & SAFE FOOD

Goal: Nutritious foods, including dietary specific foods, must be available and accessible (and less nutritious foods must be less readily available and less accessible); food (including wild foods) must not be contaminated with pathogens or industrial chemicals; and people must have the skills and knowledge to support healthy eating and physical activity.

Health

- Chronic disease & obesity rates leading country; also obesity rate of NL children
- Low rates of physical activity in NL

Education

- Loss of knowledge about food sources
- Lack of food knowledge, food education & food skills
- Loss of traditional skills & knowledge

Food Quality

- 90% of our fresh vegetables are imported to NL; issues of food quality & freshness
- Severe issues in some rural & isolated areas with quality of meat, fruit and vegetables

