

**2005 Edition, No.1, Spring**

**Editorial**  
**by Keith Davis**

Welcome to the Spring 2005 issue of the Food Security News. I am very excited about this issue because it contains some hard hitting articles from both national and international perspectives.

Bill Hynd of Oxfam Canada presents the international perspective. His article "Give Poor Farmers a Future: Make Trade Fair" gives specific examples from Africa and the Caribbean of instances where unfair competition from the U.S.A. and the European Union are hurting farmers in these regions of the world.

Denise Bradley of the Food Security Network offers us a revealing look at what life is like for the food insecure. Her article "Fight for What's Right!" is part of a presentation that she recently gave at the Chronic Disease Inequities Conference.

Bev Brown of the Food Security Network and Povnet demonstrates in her article "Poverty: Prescription for Diseases" that poverty and food insecurity pose public health risks. She draws a direct correlation between low income and the increased likelihood of illness.

Kim Todd of The Kids Eat Smart Foundation describes the current programs in NL and elsewhere and the value of community-based nutrition programs for children and youth.

If these articles inspire you to take action, be sure to read Sherril Gilbert's article "Some Strategies for Action on Food Security". Sherril offers some good advice on how to become involved in social activism.

I hope that you enjoy this issue and find it as thought provoking as I did. If you want to become involved and wish to join the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador and/or Oxfam your participation would be most welcome.

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**Time for Breakfast**  
**Kids Eat Smart Foundation supports community-based nutrition programs**  
**by Kim Todd**

Throughout Newfoundland and Labrador , more than 150 schools offer breakfast, no charge (contributions always welcome). These programs are supported by Kids Eat Smart Foundation Newfoundland and Labrador and through the school year more than

16,000 kids, from kindergarten to grade 12, and from all areas of Newfoundland and Labrador, participate in Kids Eat Smart Clubs. Most Kids Eat Smart Clubs offer breakfast-type foods – yogurt, fruit, juice, toast, milk, cereal, raisins – but there are a few lunch programs as well. In addition to schools, Kids Eat Smart-supported programs also operate at community centres.

Kids Eat Smart Program Co-ordinator Daphne LeDrew says, “Kids Eat Smart programs make nutrition part of the school culture. Programs are ‘open’, and all children can partake in a welcoming social environment. There is no pre-ordering: people just come, eat, enjoy and clean up after themselves. Nutritional quality is key: the goal of the Foundation is to ensure that all children in Newfoundland and Labrador have access to adequate nutritious food.” Toward that goal the Foundation started a Best Practices quality insurance initiative in the fall of 2004 that provides volunteer training in the areas like menu-planning, nutrition, and safe food practices.

The benefits of child nutrition programs are well-documented. Problems associated with inadequate or poor nourishment can show up in the classroom through a child’s inability to concentrate, behavioral issues and increased absenteeism due to frequency of illness. The high cost of nutritious foods, the fact that 77% of children are bussed to school, and the hectic pace of mornings are all contribute to children not having a good breakfast at home.

On the other hand, research shows that children who eat breakfast have improved memory, problem-solving skills, verbal fluency and creative abilities. Research by the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion found that children who eat school breakfast eat more fruits, drink more milk and consume less saturated fat than those who don’t eat breakfast or have breakfast at home. Qualitative research, including studies conducted by Harvard University and the University of Minnesota, also point to improvements in standardized test scores in children who ate a school breakfast.

Closer to home, a recent study funded in part by the Canadian Institute for Health Information’s Canadian Population Health Initiative indicates that schools with healthy living programs have lower rates of overweight and obese students. The study was published in the American Journal of Public Health and reflects data collected through a study of 5,200 grade five students in Nova Scotia.

Recently the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association, in conjunction with Memorial University and other wellness partners, presented a policy paper to government that looks to the school as the route to improving the health and wellness of students. Effective September 2005, schools in District 4 ( Eastern Newfoundland ), will operate under a policy that recommends a breakfast program. Kids Eat Smart Foundation is bracing itself for the increase. LeDrew says, “The Foundation has developed a comprehensive system for helping communities start programs so that the structure required to operate sustainably is ‘built-in’. That’s not to say one size fits all. Because they are community-based, all Kids Eat Smart programs are unique. Some offer sit-down cafeteria style meals, others are grab and go.”

In addition to bringing nutrition into the school, Kids Eat Smart programs can broaden the scope of what nutrition means. One school in Corner Brook has a garden, produce from which is used at the school's Kids Eat Smart Club. Many schools have student volunteers, and in the case of high schools, the programs are run by students, and can even support curriculum. Some schools use the opportunity to teach students life skills, like grocery shopping. In all cases, community is what makes the time for breakfast. Community makes programs work.

### **Give Poor Farmers A Future: Make Trade Fair by Bill Hynd**

Most of the world's poor, over 2.5 billion people, live in rural areas and work as small farmers. In poor countries, agriculture is important for survival, for employment and for government revenue. In the world's poorest countries the sale of primary agricultural crops - corn, rice, cotton, sugar, coffee - accounts for 70% of overall revenue. Agricultural trade is worth US\$674 billion a year, but most of it goes to rich countries; Africa captures barely 4%. Fairer trade rules could lift poor countries and poor farmers out of poverty.

The USA and European Union pay their farmers hundreds of billions of dollars each year - with the wealthiest farmers and agribusinesses hogging most of it. This encourages massive over-production and the dumping of cheap surpluses onto world markets and into poor countries. Poor farmers cannot compete. Hundreds of millions of poor farmers are finding it difficult to even earn a subsistence living. Many are leaving their land and heading for crowded urban slums and uncertain futures. This crisis has reached alarming levels.

#### **Rice**

Indol Fils grows rice in the Artobonite Valley of Haiti. Like small farmers the world over, Indol seeks a fair return when he sells his crop. Because of subsidized rice from the USA, Indol is not able to sell his rice in the local market. "Rice producers want a better life. We work hard for it. But when we get to market we are bombarded with an invasion of cheap imported rice, so we have to sell at any price that a buyer is prepared to give us. How can we compete against the big guys?"

#### **Milk**

Fiona Black works in the Jamaican dairy industry. She has experienced first-hand dairy farmers throwing away milk they are unable to sell as a result of cheap subsidized milk from the European Union. "Dairy farmers are crying out for help. But we cannot offer them a market while processors have a choice of cheap imports. This is our opportunity to say to Europe: Export subsidies are killing the developing countries. Jamaican farmers are pleading with you"

#### **Cotton**

Francois Traore, a cotton farmer in Burkina Faso, has seen the price of cotton drop by half as a result of the massive subsidies the US government provides to its large cotton farms. "If you receive subsidies, the price at which you sell your cotton does not matter. Those of us who do not receive any kind of support cannot sell our cotton - no matter its quality."

#### Coffee

An oversupply of coffee beans has caused a collapse in world prices. While the giant coffee corporations capture the benefits, millions of small coffee farmers face poverty. Tatu Mesyni, a coffee farmer and a mother of two children from the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania, is personally affected by low coffee bean prices. "The price of coffee is destroying this whole community. I cannot even afford to feed and clothe my children. Now I can't even pay to keep my children in school. Because I get so little from selling coffee, I will have to find work cutting grass or weeding on commercial farms."

Hundreds of million farmers the world over are counting on fairer trade rules. Throughout 2005 Oxfam International is campaigning to mobilize citizens the world over to pressure rich countries to MAKE TRADE FAIR. Oxfam's goal is to make their BIG NOISE petition the largest trade petition ever.

If you would like to support this effort visit [www.maketradefair.com](http://www.maketradefair.com) and join the Big Noise.

*You can also visit Oxfam Canada's website at [www.oxfam.ca](http://www.oxfam.ca) to join their e-community Oxfam Canada e-Alerts is a periodic email service providing notice of urgent Oxfam news, campaign actions and updates.*

#### **Fight For What's Right!** **by Denise Bradley**

I have a saying that I teach people: "Fight for what's right and don't be afraid to let your voice be heard." Over the years I have been one of the voices for the Newfoundland and Labrador Food Security Network and some other organizations. I have put my life and my family's life on my sleeve. I believe we need to teach others to find that little inner voice and speak out, and loud. I believe that for each person that takes that little step forward, someone else will gain the courage to follow along.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food insecurity exists when that access is compromised.

A 2001 Statistics Canada report called Food Insecurity in Canadian Households reported that people relying on social assistance were at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity. Youth are a significant part of this province's support income caseload, which

supports about a tenth of our population. A third of these people, have physical, mental and social disabilities.

On the first and fifteenth of the month I can stand in the grocery check out line and tell you who is who. I mean I can recognize who is getting that whopping' check of \$235 for two weeks from HRLE or that single person that is getting \$170. When you hear these figures maybe now you can understand why there is no fresh milk, fresh fruit and vegetables in their shopping cart. Instead you will see a lot of frozen french fries, tinned processed foods such as meat balls and gravy, corned beef, hot dogs, mince meat and the ever famous macaroni dinner ... and oh, I forgot the juice crystals.

Just think: we teach our children that milk is an important part of your diet and in order for your bones and teeth to grow strong and properly, we must drink the amount recommended in the Canada Food Guide. So here's a little lesson in Milk Math for a family of four where two adults and two children are expected to drink up to four glasses of milk each a day. That is a minimum of 2-litres of milk a day. At \$3.39 a day for seven days, that totals \$23.73 a week for milk. Consider that the average low income family receives about \$12,000 a year. To purchase milk in quantities that meet the food guide costs a family \$1233.96 a year. This means that milk constitutes an entire month's income. It's no wonder a family can't afford to buy it.

In our recent budget the provincial government gave a small raise to singles and couples. That raise equals an extra loaf of bread. Families, however, were forgotten because apparently we can depend on the school lunch programme. Must I remind government and professionals that school lunches ends in grade six? I question the thinking on this. Does a child stop growing and thinking at this age? When children and youth go to school hungry, miss out on a nutritious lunch or fail to get adequate nutrition at home, just what are we doing to our next generation?

Many wonderful programmes are designed for the poor and food insecure. They teach about healthy eating and how to budget. Many of us have benefit from the healthy eating programmes that are set up in our communities. The problem is that we get to sample the goods at the programme but most times we do not have enough money to buy even basic shelf items much less the products we sample. This social exclusion will continue to have an impact on health in later years.

More and more families are facing the harsh realities of poverty and the shock it brings with it. Many families are faced with job cuts and layoffs. You fight to keep your job so that you can keep that substandard apartment you're renting. The working poor don't live at the edge of poverty: we are living the cycle of poverty.

These are the inequities that challenge many of us each day. Let's find our allies and work together in groups like the Food Security Network to have a healthy community and province.

**Poverty: Prescription for Diseases**  
**by Bev Brown, PovNet**

Health Canada and the Canadian Public Health Association agree that low income, more than lifestyle factors such as smoking and inactivity, is the biggest contributor to obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.

People with low incomes buy cheaper food which is worse for health, such as white bread and macaroni, and cannot afford the protein, fresh fruit and vegetables necessary for health. This means growing up poor puts us at a greater risk to develop heart disease, diabetes, and obesity, according to a Bristol based study in the British Medical Journal.

A recent Canadian study found low income to be the biggest factor in heart disease. The York University paper names social exclusion, caused by prejudicial policies that hurt poor people, as a major reason people get heart disease. The research defined social exclusion as material deprivation, not participating in activities others enjoy, and being left out of decision making and group activities.

This study is called: "Inequality is bad for our hearts". Check it out at <http://yorku.ca/wellness/heart.pdf>

The answer to this problem is obvious: better distribution of wealth. However, studies show that income distribution in Canada is less equitable than it used to be. The federal abdication for responsibility for welfare that transferred this portfolio to the provinces in the 1990s, combined with lean provincial budgets that starve the poor, and creeping inflation all produce preventable diseases - diseases that cost us all more than it would to feed people properly in the first place.

Unemployment insurance has also been cut enough over the years to put more people here into the category of not being able to eat properly. Minimum wage, although rising, is still not enough to afford a healthy diet, and needs to be higher too.

The Newfoundland Dietetic Association has been producing reports about the cost of nutritious food appropriate to the island. This study found that it costs \$35-\$40 a week to feed a single person for a week, and \$125. to feed a family. The income support unemployed people receive is just over half this amount, in some cases, and less in others because of skyrocketing expenses like heat and rent. The slight raise given to people in some income support categories in the recent budget was about half last year's creeping inflation, and did not begin to meet people's real costs to keep healthy.

These low amounts unemployed and badly employed people receive from our governments are like being given a prescription from the government to get a disease. And that is why the poor die younger than the middle class in Canada . This is totally unnecessary, totally preventable.

I would like to see income support rates, employment insurance, and minimum wage all indexed to the real cost of living. Our country has signed national and international charters and covenants about our citizens' right to food, and these bind our provinces too. It's time to make our governments meet their signed obligations. Public pressure is one way to accomplish this.

So, write or phone your MHA, write or phone your MP, and let them know you want everyone in our province to be able to afford a healthy diet and have access to good health.

**Some Strategies For Action On Food Security  
by Sherrill Gilbert and adapted from Thought About Food? A Workbook on Food Security and Influencing Public Policy**

Start a dialogue in your organization or community.

Get people talking about the issue. Hold public meetings in your community or a workshop in your organization. Contact the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador for more information on workshops. Focus on aspects of food security that will appeal to the target group's interests or sympathy.

Form a food policy group.

These are usually municipal or regional in scope and in some cases have taken on advisory roles with city councils. Some, such as groups in Toronto and Sudbury, have received support and full sponsorship from municipal governments. The most effective Food Policy Groups have a diverse membership that includes farmers, processors, wholesalers, distributors, grocers, restaurateurs, health professionals, anti-poverty advocates, school system representatives, journalists, researchers, and other concerned citizens.

Build good working relationships.

No matter what path you take in your efforts to take action on food security in your community, you will need to develop cooperative, constructive relationships with many different people. To build good working relationships, be honest, be calm and polite, be fair and well-informed, be helpful, be patient, and practice and use good dialogue skills such as open listening and suspending judgment.

Circulate a petition.

A good petition contains a clear and concise statement or request for action or policy, as well as a brief explanation of why the request is being made. Include lots of space for people to write their signature, their full name, address and/or organization, and phone number. All this is necessary to ensure that the signatures appear valid to the person receiving the petition.

Write letters.

You can write to politicians to say that you support or do not support something they did, when you feel more action is needed, or to thank them for supporting your view. You can also send letters to the editors of local newspapers.

Meet with policy makers and politicians.

At some point in any activity that involves advocating for policy change, you'll need to meet with political representatives. Before the meeting, plan, organize and prepare. Decide what you want to talk about, who you want to talk to, and who should attend the meeting. Follow up with a brief note thanking the person for the meeting and summarizing what was said.

Speak out.

The best way to reach people in your community is to talk to them – either informally or formally. Share information informally whenever you run into someone; and formally through press releases, interviews, and making presentations to key stakeholder groups.

### **Thank You to All FSN Supporters**

The Board of Directors of the Food Security Network would like to say a big thank you to all those who have given generously of their time, talents and/or resources to support the Network during the past year. Without naming names, this includes all those who have contributed by participating in the story sharing project, assisting with the display at the Folk Festival, taking part in the street theatre at the Peace Accord, writing proposals for funding, contributing to the newsmagazine, representing the FSN on committees and at public events and consultations, assisting with the World Food Day community supper, having input into the brief on the minimum wage, providing space for meetings, helping with the office, coming to the AGM, participating in the pilot workshop for “Thought about Food?: A Workbook on Food Security and Policy” and on it goes .....

There are many ways to get involved in the Food Security Network. New members are always welcome. If you have an idea or a concern that you would like to bring forward or if you're looking for a way that you can contribute, feel free to drop us a line. Our e-mail address is [fsnl@firstcity.net](mailto:fsnl@firstcity.net).