

The Food Security Network of Newfoundland & Labrador is a non-profit organization formed by participants at a public meeting held in St. John's in April 1998 to discuss what to do about increasing hunger in our province. Our members include individuals and organizations throughout the province who are involved in health care, education, farming, community development, family services, anti-poverty work, emergency food aid, school nutrition programs, and environmental protection.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Editorial

Research in England Establishes a Link ...

Food Security: It's Everybody's Business

FSN Member Receives Environmental Award

The Spruce Hill Farms Story

Hats Off to the Dietitians of Canada

Indigenous Foods for Health Promotion ...

Recent Events

Upcoming Events

Editorial

by Bev Brown

The provincial government continues to ask Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for feedback about the Poverty Reduction Strategy. If this strategy is successful, we will have more good jobs in this province, higher income support rates, less use of food banks, and an increase in co-operative community approaches to the important issue of food security for everyone.

If this sounds like an impossible dream, check out some figures from Social Watch, a group founded to monitor commitments made at the 1995 UN social summits in Copenhagen and Beijing: Between 1997 and 2003, Canada's economy was the fastest growing among G-8 rich countries, expanding 55 per cent in real terms, with a Gross National Product surpassing \$1 trillion dollars!

However, federal spending is only at 11 per cent of the economy, down 5 per cent from 1993-4, and well below historic averages. The deep cuts of the mid '90s have not been offset by federal spending increases.



More than 1.7 million households in Canada live on less than \$20,000 a year, and most of this group is precariously housed, spending more than 30 per cent of income on rent.

Only 38 per cent of unemployed workers receive government benefits, down from 75 per cent in the early 1990s.

Many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have been hurt by more restrictive Employment Insurance rules.

We live in a rich country that is doing very well in the world, but our federal and provincial governments are failing to redistribute our wealth fairly. In order to achieve the very reachable goal of food security for everyone, positive efforts must be made by our governments to reverse the trend of an increasing wealth gap between rich and poor people.

Let us hope the provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy sees redistribution of our public wealth as the best way to lift everyone out of the current dismal fact of starvation and deprivation, preventable disease and early death for people in this province.

Research in England Establishes a Link Between Essential Fatty Acids and Many Behaviors and Learning Disorders

by Melba Rabinowitz

Felicity Lawrence, writer for the Guardian, the daily paper for the city of Manchester, England describes current research taking place at Oxford University. Below are some excerpts from the story. To see full story with its related links, go to <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

Dr. John Stein, professor of physiology at Oxford University has gathered a team of researchers to study the mechanisms by which deficiencies of essential fats in the diet affect the working of the brain. The

scientists estimate that about two thirds of the children they see for behavioural and learning difficulties have problems which arise with the magnacellar pathway of the brain and is a nutrition-based problem. They explain that these children who are often treated with drugs and/or psychological treatments while nutrition is neglect or ignored. The scientists are undertaking a collection of controlled studies, where fish oils high in Omega-3 essential fats are introduced. The depart-

ment's latest work was published earlier this month by Stein's colleagues, Alexandra Richardson. She studied more than 100 children of normal ability in mainstream schools in County Durham, who were underachieving and suspected of being dyspraxic - that is of having problems with coordination or motor skills. In some cases, the children were also disruptive.

"Once they had been assessed, they were divided into two groups for a randomized double-



“The brain is a metabolic powerhouse, which despite being only 2% of our body mass, consumes around 20% of available energy ...”

Research in England ... continued

blind, placebo-controlled trial. Half of them were given fish oils high in Omega-3 essential fats for three months. The other half were given placebos. Some 40% of the children given supplements made dramatic improvement in reading and spelling, averaging progress of more than nine months in just three months. The control group made just then normal progress of three months.

Although none have been diagnosed with ADHD, a third was found to have sufficient problems to put them in this category. But when given fish oils, half of them made so much progress they no longer counted as having attention disorders - a change on par with improvements made when children are prescribed stimulant drugs such as Ritalin. The raw data disguises the excitement and relief experienced by many of the parents whose children were being treated. After three months, the control group switched from placebos to active supplements and showed similar leaps in progress.”

Lawrence continues, “The implications of a study conducted by another researcher in Steins’ department are even more startling. In another randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, Bernard Gesch gave a course of supplements containing essential fatty acids and key vitamins and minerals to prisoners in one of Britain’s maximum security prisons. The inmates were responsible for some of the highest levels of prison violence in the UK.

The number of serious offences, including violence by the prisoners, fell by nearly 40% in those taking the supplements but not at all in those not taking them. To Gesch, the case is just bleeding obvious. He says, “The brain is a metabolic powerhouse, which despite being only 2% of our body mass, consumes around 20% of available energy. To metabolize this energy requires a range of nutrients, vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids. These are essential for the normal functioning of the brain, which means there are likely to be consequences if we don’t get enough of them from our diet.”

Chemicals that keep the brain sharp: The brain, the nervous and vascular systems and to a lesser extent, all cells in the body use a special kind of fat in their construction, known as essential fat. The brain alone is comprised of three quarters of this fat, which has a different chemical composition to the visible fat the body uses as a way of storing energy. There are two different types of essential fatty acids. These essential fatty acids cannot be made in the body and must be eaten in the diet. Animals and fish eat the plants containing the short chain fatty acids, and their digestive systems change the fat, extending the length of the carbon chain. When people eat meat or fish they build on these building blocks again. It is the long chain fatty acid derivatives that are used in human brain construction,

in particular in the construction of cell membranes. These different chemical structures give the fats different properties: saturated fats are hard and inflexible, while polyunsaturated fats are liquid. Essential fats are unstable, so they are stripped from foods by industrial processing where shelf life and stability are considered more important than nutrition.

Stein, the leader of the team, explains, “Our mind set is so sociological, we don’t look for the physiological explanations. An awful lot of money goes into cognitive approaches to criminology, though they’ve never been shown to work. He speculates that it’s no coincidence that most crime and antisocial behaviour is committed by young pubescent males when their rapidly growing bodies have to compete with their brains for nutrients inadequately provided by junk food diets. He emphasizes that “puberty is a really crucial time -it’s the second big burst of brain development - after fetal development. “

Stein’s advice to all: Cut out the junk food because they have been stripped of essential fatty acids. Stick to unprocessed foods such as fish and eat frequently, ideally three times a week.

Other Links:

- www.fabresearch.org
Details of research on food and behaviour
- www.dyslexic.org.uk.
Dyslexia Research Charitable Trust Web Site

Food Security: It’s Everybody’s Business! A Major New Initiative of The Food Security Network of NL

by Sherril Gilbert

Food Security: It’s Everybody’s Business! is an exciting new project of the Food Security Network which will focus on building awareness of food security and working towards changes which

lead to increased food security in this province.

Our project goal is to create a strong, common vision and an action plan based on community

participation, collaborative partnerships, capacity-building, and policy changes, in order to increase food security and well-being and reduce poverty in this province.

Food Security: Its Everybody's Business! ... continued

Project Objectives

- Create an awareness that food security affects everyone;
- Provide opportunities for conversations about food security within communities and across sectors province-wide;
- Identify, support and nurture leadership and partnerships within communities and across sectors; and
- Develop collaborative strategies for building and sustaining regional networks and the provincial Food Security Network.

Key Change Strategies:

- Workshops to build awareness about food security and ways of affecting public policy using a specially designed tool, Thought About Food? A Workbook on Food Security and Influencing Policy;
- Public awareness campaigns: presentations by trained Community Advocates to service clubs, community groups, business and labour groups, religious groups, and schools;
- Presentations & displays at seminars, festivals and events;

- Community conversations, forums and roundtables; and
- Whole-system event: Food Security gathering with participation from all sectors and regions

For more information, please contact:

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“Our project goal is to create a strong, common vision and an action plan based on community participation, collaborative partnerships, capacity-building, and policy changes ... ”

FSN Member Receives Environmental Award

by Deborah Guillemette

Mervin Wisemen, President, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation recently presented the organization's annual environmental award to Mike Rabinowitz, at the Annual General Meeting held on April 22, 2005, Glenmill Inn, Corner Brook. Mike is Co-Owner of the Organic Farm, an organizational member of the Food Security Network. The Agriculture Environmental Awards Program gives recognition to farmers who have contributed in a meaningful way to the conservation and enhancement of the natural resources used by the agriculture industry. The aim is to help educate, inform and encourage all farmers in Newfoundland and Labrador to play an active role in activities which promote environmental sustainability. Rabinowitz who owns and operates the Organic Farm in Portugal Cove was nominated by provincial environmental planner, Tara Neal. In her nomi-

nation letter, Ms. Neal writes, “Being an organic farm, the use of most manures and chemicals are restricted. This producer sees no problem in this. He recently incorporated green manuring into his operation for soil building and uses various means of integrated pest management. Without such good environmental management of an agriculture system, one could not possibly grow the variety and amount of things that this farm does on the amount of land on which it sits. I have never seen such variety grown in such a small area in Atlantic Canada, much less our province.”

The Organic Farm is carrying out a greenhouse gas mitigation project in cooperation with the Newfoundland Horticulture Society, provides vegetables, herbs and edible flowers to local restaurants, manages a bulk buying club which delivers vegetables weekly and has recently begun farm gate sales of seeds, seedlings and nurs-

ery plants. The farm is in its eleventh year of operation and has been an organizational member of FSN for three years.

For more information about the Environmental Award or the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, contact:

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“The Agriculture Environmental Awards Program gives recognition to farmers who have contributed in a meaningful way to the conservation and enhancement of the natural resources used by the agriculture industry.”

“Today, Spruce Hill Farms Inc. has eleven partners and is involved in a wide range of activities ...”

GOOD NEWS: It's Happening Right Here in Newfoundland! The Spruce Hill Farms Story

by Melba Rabonowitz

Reg Legge was a commercial farmer who owned and operated agriculture property located in Heart's Content for over thirty years. He grew traditional crops which include hay, carrots, potatoes, cabbage, rutabaga, etc. He also raised a family of six children. Because there was no one to take over the farm succession, in 1966, Legge retired and put the 52-acre farm on the market. Timing could not have been better for the residents of the Lower Trinity South Regional Development Association.

The volunteer organization was dedicated to improving the social and economic conditions for the

residents of eleven communities in the area. Through funding from ACOA and other partners, the farm was bought by a subsidiary company of LWSRDA with a vision of a Skills/Experimental Research Facility.

Today Spruce Hill Farms, Inc. has eleven partners and is involved in a wide range of activities from commercial production in traditional and non-traditional crops (i.e. brussel sprouts, celery, Chinese cabbage, garlic, asparagus and corn) as well as research and development (i.e. corn and berry research, rose hips, rutabaga seeds, organic compost, etc.).

The farm provides internships

and mentoring for young people through a Youth Employment Strategy. A video hook-up to the state-of-the-art greenhouse operation enables all grade six children in the Eastern School District to follow the planting and growing taking place in the greenhouse via Web Cam, Video, and IT. Content is integrated into their curriculum through the Agri-food sector.

This site also provides an internship opportunity for students enrolled in agriculture courses at the College of the North Atlantic.

For more information or to schedule a visit, see:

www.sprucehillfarms.ca

Hats Off to the Dietitians of Canada

by Melba Rabinowitz

I am affiliated with a number of groups who support an anti-poverty advocacy role as well as professional organizations that say they have a responsibility to ensure that social policies and conditions promote the health and well-being of all. However, this is the first time that I have read a clear statement of public policy which the organizations expects its members to follow, at an ethical, personal and professional level. I am not a dietitian but I believe that the Public Policy recently published by the Dietitians of Canada can be an example to us all, especially professionals working within the arena of health and family services where the rages of poverty are the most visible. The summary below is taken from the Executive Summary of a longer paper. It is a challenge to all of us to put our mouth and our advocacy efforts, where our profession is.

The paper begins by recogniz-

ing that food security is a determinant of health and that it is important to reduce health inequities through the pursuit of social justice. This is a population health approach which addresses the root cause of individual and household food insecurity - poverty- through improvements to the social safety net.. The recommendations challenge dietitians to contribute to the solution in a personal and professional capacity, working toward the big goal of social change. It includes the following actions for DC members: To work in coalitions with others, including community-based organizations and anti-poverty advocates, to advocate for policies to reduce poverty; conduct and publicize research supporting policies to strengthen the social safety net. It cautions members to “vote and vote wisely”, explaining that political parties espousing policies to cut taxes and privatize services in-

variably cut the social programs on which food-insecurity people depend. It emphasizes the use empowerment strategies in community-based food programming, insists that these programs need to be structured to include the most marginalized and that this is achieved by listening to and respecting program clients' diverse knowledge and experiences. It recommends that dietitians be reflective in their professional practice and understand that the view of “walking in his or her shoes,” is the key to successful coalition building. It goes on to challenge members to “educate yourself and others on the issues and processes to achieve food security through social change and to look for ways that DC can promote food security for all Canadians.”

The executive summary is published in the Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research (Vol. 66, No. 1, Spring, 2005).



Indigenous Foods for Health Promotion in Newfoundland and Labrador

by Sahar Iqbal, MSc, MD

Statistics Canada figures reveal that Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) have the highest rates of diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke. Poor nutrition habits contribute greatly to the high rates of chronic disease. Scientific evidence suggests that local and native grown foods indigenous to NL have health benefits. Game meats, for instance, are rich in protein and iron and low in fat while berries are rich in fibre, vitamins and antioxidants. Hence depending more on indigenous foods or foods native to the province may be one way to promote health for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

A secondary analysis of some data collected by Nutrition New-

foundland and Labrador showed that a majority of people included indigenous foods regularly in their diets. However data showed that people seemed to be eating either too much or too little. For example, game meats were eaten in amounts double the recommended serving sizes whereas berries were eaten in amounts equivalent to only a fifth of the recommended serving size. Women tended to eat less game meats and more berries. Indigenous foods also have high acceptability, accessibility and availability.

The study recommended that health promotion programs in NL should encourage greater amount and variety of indigenous foods. Programs should however em-

phasize that game meats should be eaten in recommended amounts as a replacement to other less healthy meats such as beef and pork. Women and the elderly should be encouraged to eat game meats more often. Programs should also encourage everyone to eat berries in amounts compatible with recommendations of Health Canada.

Consuming indigenous foods as recommended could help prevent disease and promote health by improving overall nutritional status. Moreover, indigenous foods may also address food insecurity in Newfoundland and Labrador.

“Scientific evidence suggests that local and native grown foods indigenous to NL have health benefits.”

Recent Events

Student Career Placement

FSN was successful in getting funding for a student employment grant for this summer. Katie Temple who is a full-time graduate student in Community Health at Memorial University was hired in late June. Ms Temple is interested in food security and indigenous foods and brought considerable enthusiasm and energy to the eight-week term of summer employment.

Aisling Gogan, appointed Director, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Province of NL

Ms. Gogan was seconded from the Women’s Policy Office to the Department of Human Resources Labour and Employment, which will house the role of poverty reduction. FSN welcomes Ms.

Gogan to the role and looks forward to collaborating around poverty reduction strategies which are obviously so critical to food security of many, many people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

To contact Ms. Gogan: Phone: (709) 729- 6053; Fax: (709) 729- 5139

Changes to Plant Breeder’s Rights Act will affect Food Security

Canadian Organic Growers - March 2005

Canadian Organic Growers (COG) and other farming groups filed their response to the government’s call for input on proposed amendments to the Plant Breeder’s Rights Act. COG fears that the changes would empower

a few dominant seed companies to further control the seed supply and erode farmers’ rights to save seeds. The proposed amendments would ultimately reduce genetic diversity, increase our chemical dependence and increase costs for small scale farmers who are already struggling to make a living.

For more information on COG’s recommendations and how changes to the Plant Breeder’s Rights Act could impact farmers and food security in Canada, go to: www.cog.ca.





Up-Coming Events

Join the Food Security Movement Taking Place in Canada.

After a year of planning, a Food Security Assembly may be launched in early October, 2005 in Waterloo, Ontario. In October, 2004, over 200 people representing a diverse group of organizations and individuals working on food security across Canada met at the Winnipeg Food Assembly. An organization would be formed to advocate and speak on food security issues facing Canadians. Conference delegates unanimously agreed that the organization would be founded upon three principles: (1) Zero Hunger; (2) A Sustainable Food System, and (3) Healthy and Safe Food.

A working group from across Canada was appointed and a proposal was drafted and is being circulated. All FSN members are invited to access and comment on the proposal. The plan is to adopt the final version and formally launch the organization at the Food Security Assembly coming up in Waterloo, Ontario in early October 2005.

Membership will be open to both groups and individuals. You can be a founding member of the national food security organization.

To read the proposal (French and English versions are available), go to: http://www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/resources_05.html

Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference

October 21-23, 2005

A Celebration of Hope and Opportunity, Burlington, VT

For more information, go to www.uvm.edu/wagn/womeninag.html

Make Trade Fair: Sign the Petition

Oxfam is circulating a petition, The Big Noise, calling on world leaders to change the rules when they go back to the World Trade Organization table in the fall. Poor farmers are getting a raw deal because of unfair trade rules. The U.S. is dumping rice and other necessary foods in poor countries. Local farmers are going out of business and poor people are paying more for the food they need as the prices for dumped foods are increased. Oxfam is asking Canadians to sign the petition.

For more information, go to www.maketradefair.com

Seeking Volunteers for Public Awareness Campaign!

FSN will begin a public awareness campaign in the near future. The campaign entitled, "We're Glad You Asked!" will provide workshops and presentations to service clubs, churches, community centres, family resource programs and other community groups.

This campaign continues the recent FSN activities including the Cost of Food Study, a workshop entitled, Food Security Is Everybody Business offered in the spring 2005 and the paper submissions to government on minimum wage and school fees. The plan is to continue to raise awareness about the barriers to accessing healthy and adequate food, and to learn more about how we can work together to seek solutions to the food insecurity, hunger and poverty in our province.

We welcome volunteers who would like to participate in the campaign, advocates who want to tell their stories, individuals who want to be trained in presenting the Cost of Food Study and facilitators to work with community groups. If you just want to listen and observe, that's okay also. The more people involved, the higher our energy will be. FSN will provide transportation and child care to enable your participation.

For more information or to volunteer, contact, public awareness committee members:

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