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**Rights to Inclusion and Food Security for all: A Call for Collective Action!**  
**by Rob Sinnott**

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People with disabilities are more likely to live with food insecurity and to live in poverty. They are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed or on Income Support. According to a recent report from the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy, an entire third of people on Income Support programs have a disability. To hear more from this report please visit [www.gov.nl.ca/publicat/povertydiscussion-final.pdf](http://www.gov.nl.ca/publicat/povertydiscussion-final.pdf) People with disabilities experience exclusion based on different levels of identity including but not limited to: ability, class, and for women gender. This article will share my reflections as a social worker, on the issues of identity-based food insecurity and poverty.

People who have a disability are excluded based on their level of ability. Lack of physical accessibility in the home and community is often a social barrier for people seeking increased inclusion in society. There is a shortage of accessible homes in the province Those that do exist, are often costly. People, therefore, are forced to make housing choices that may not meet their needs, limiting their participation in society. People have few choices for transportation and often rely on what has become an overused urban Wheelway system. Although this system serves peoples' needs well at times, some people cannot afford the \$5.00 return trip, limiting their outings to essentials such as grocery shopping or appointments.

People with disabilities often have little money for recreational activities. When people have a need for home support services they must apply to their local Health Board, and are financially assessed at the rate of Income Support, including those new to either system. Also, the Special Assistance Program that provides equipment such as walkers and wheelchairs, only provides certain items at the exclusion of others. This limits peoples' choices and their level of ability - how they are included and supported in the community.

Many people with disabilities say they would like to be working. Also many people view and report employment as a source of well-being and an indicator of life satisfaction. Some people who talk about solutions to poverty will talk about investing in the employability of people, including people with disabilities. This stems from the old view that people must be contributing members of society, and employment is viewed as a measure of this contribution. The result is that those who do not work are made to feel less worthy, less deserving. Some people with disabilities want to work, but experience many obstacles and barriers including social exclusion, lack of accessibility and lack of opportunities. Additionally, when people accept (often low-wage) employment, they risk losing eligibility for Income Support and therefore benefits as drug cards, medical supplies, equipment, and home support services. However, we must be mindful , that all people have the right to be supported and to have their needs met when employment is not possible. It is also known that equipment and adaptive technology can help increase the ability of people to be employed in the workplace. I had the recent privilege of visiting the ILRC (Independent Living Resource Centre) for the release of a research project that explored the value of adaptive technology to women who have disabilities ( [www.ilrc.nf.ca/Waat/waat\\_home.htm](http://www.ilrc.nf.ca/Waat/waat_home.htm)).

Leslie Macleod of ILRC, says , “Aquiring (or having) a disability can be a life- sentence to poverty”. She adds that poverty is a constant presence in people’s lives. She discussed the particular impact on women who are more likely to live in poverty and the impact on families when all members are affected by the experience of disability, the Income Support system, and poverty.

Having access to healthy and nutritious food is essential for all of us in society, and is recognized as key to preventative health and active living. People with disabilities, in being more likely to live in poverty, are limited in what they can afford and are more likely to experience food insecurity. It is well known that the symptoms and presence of many illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, cancer, HIV/AIDS, can be reduced with accessibility to healthy foods. Having access to nutritious foods also contributes to healthy bones, muscles and organs, which is most important to the strengthening and ability of everyone . Yet people are forced to make certain spending choices, for types of food. Food needs are often put second when people are faced with meeting other necessities such as paying rent and bills .

So where does this leave us? I hope that this article highlights some of the many inequalities and injustices that people with disabilities experience on a daily basis. Yes there are many services to support people with disabilities, yet they are frequently still excluded from society. How do we end food insecurity and poverty, how do we end oppression? We begin by personally examining our own place in society, including our privileges. We attempt to understand what it must mean for people who have a different social location – as we can never fully understand someone else’s reality. In understanding, we can join others in their struggle by becoming an ‘ally’ – as they name their experience, and challenge all of us to change and eliminate their experience of exclusion and poverty. This is our challenge and this article is your invitation! While there are individuals, organizations and governments that work at making changes, there is still much to be done. What will be your contribution to change? How can you become involved? You can learn about local initiatives related to food security and poverty reduction. You can become involved and join with others, through your personal initiatives, involvement in community groups, or advocating for policy changes!

### **Agriculture Is Important to Province’s Economy by Toni Marx, Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Agriculture**

Agriculture is such an important pillar to Canadian society and indeed the Canadian economy – representing as much as 8% of our GDP and contributing to as many as 300,000 jobs in all areas of the value chain.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we boast about an industry worth over a half billion dollars and providing over 6000 jobs – most of them in rural parts of the province.

There has been tremendous growth in the industry in this province over the last four years. Last year we led the country in growth, along with British Columbia, in realized net farming income.

Agriculture has been identified by the provincial government as an important growth area and listed as a priority in all 9 sectors of its Regional Diversification Strategy.

To achieve our goals of development and expansion of agriculture in this province the role of our federal politicians will be critical.

Currently a number of key issues affecting agriculture hang in a balance, both nationally and provincially:

1. Talks are underway at within the WTO is threatening the stability of supply management; an all important production and marketing tool used by a number of commodity organizations to achieve a fair return from the market place.
2. The five year Federal/Provincial agreement on agriculture, the Agriculture Policy Framework (APF), will expire in the next two years. Funding and program criteria will be totally operative to the future of agriculture in this province in the next decade.
3. Many pillars under the current APF agreement are deemed to be seriously under funded including Business Risk Management or the Canadian Agriculture Income Stabilization Programme (CAIS) – putting income stabilization in question and leaving little capacity to respond to disasters such as BSE, AI and other national occurrences. Many issues of public good under APF – such as food safety, environment and animal welfare have been downloaded on producers with very little leverage to pass this cost on to the marketplace.
4. Other Federal government funding programs such as ACOA's programs are critical to the development of agriculture in this province, especially in the value added or secondary processing sector – what will be its future in the next federal government?
5. What is the future of federally funded research in this province? Current consultations will make that determination in the next few months.
6. What will happen to the Federal farm loan guarantee program under Farm Improvement and Marketing Co-operatives Loans Act which was earmarked to go in last year's federal budget, and which is now under review?
7. What will happen to another federal government loan program called the Advance Payment Plan Program (APP)? This program is currently not available to farmers in this province - making NL the only province in Canada without access to the program. This program is supposed to extend coverage to additional commodities such as livestock.
8. What will happen to the Wayne Easter report, which laid the foundation for farmer empowerment in the marketplace – to get a fair share of an industry that is farmer driven? To provide ways and means of easing the current farm income crisis in the face of record high returns to everyone in the value chain, except farmers.
9. What kind of support will farmers get on the proposed farm bill that is being put forward by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture?

These are only a few issues that are pivotal to the future of agriculture in this province and across the country. Farmers do not expect instant experts from our politicians on many of the complex issues affecting farming and farmers, but we are expecting a commitment of engagement – and today we hope to see what that engagement means to the candidates here today.

## **The Grocery Bus** **by Jill Barron**

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I never thought that shopping could be so much FUN, until I began working as the Grocery Bus Coordinator at the Seniors Resource Centre that is.

Each week on Tuesday and Wednesday the "Grocery Bus" travels to Bidgood's Supermarket in the Gould's. On average we provide transportation to 33 vibrant individuals who look forward each week to seeing friends, while picking up their weekly supply.

It's always nice to go for a drive but it's the people on the bus who make the experience so enjoyable. Most of my family and friends live outside of Newfoundland so the opportunity to get to know the more than sixty people who use the grocery bus service regularly is something I cherish. So many stories to hear, so many experiences to share, so many laughs, so many smiles.

I look forward each week to making my scheduling calls, and to seeing my new friends on the bus. People are missed when they can't make it because of illness or other commitments but usually return a week later with a smile on their face and a new story to tell.

Sometimes I wish the drive was longer so that I could really talk to everyone, or so we could hear another original song sung from the front of the bus, or hear another wise crack from the back row of the bus.

It's a lot like a big family this group that I travel with each week. Everyone has their role: some choose to entertain, others are quietly wise, some are mischievous, while others are always in place. Each and every one bringing a different element to what otherwise could be just a one-hour drive and a few bags of groceries.

I think of the impact that the "Grocery Bus" has had on me and then I stop to consider what it means to the people who have been using this service for the last ten years. It gives them a chance to be independent. One alternative for many would be to depend on their children to take them shopping on their schedule. The other alternative would be to hire a taxi which would be more costly, lonely, and provide less service. The primary goal of the "Grocery Bus" program is to promote greater self-sufficiency, independence and responsibility by providing an opportunity for seniors to shop on their own. A secondary goal is to provide an opportunity for seniors to socialise with other seniors in the community.

There is always room for more people in our family that is the "Grocery Bus". If you would be interested in joining us please call the Seniors Resource Centre at 737-2333. I know you have a smile to share and a dozen stories that we can't wait to hear. An empty seat is reserved for you on our bus.

**"Food Security", It's Everybody's Business: Highlights '05**

**by Sherril Gilbert**

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Food Security Network's new 2.5-year project, "Food Security: It's Everybody's Business!", is well underway. We have been very involved with laying the groundwork for a meaningful initiative that is intended to have a positive impact in increasing food security in this province.

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. We believe that food security is a poverty issue, and that it is also a much broader issue which involves the whole food system, affecting every one of us in some way. Because food insecurity is a systems problem, to deal with it effectively requires the input and participation of people from all the parts of the food system.

To do this, one of the core purposes of our project is to bring together people from the different parts of the food system to talk about food security. We have, so far, held three Community Consultations in St. John's, with representatives attending from diverse organizations such as the Newfoundland & Labrador Environment Network, Kilbride to Ferryland Family Resource Centre, The Organic Farm, City of St. John's, Dietitians of Newfoundland & Labrador, Oxfam Canada, CHANNAL, Independent Living Resource Centre, Seniors' Resource Centre, and Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Social Workers. (We are seeking additional funding that will assist us in conducting many more Community Consultations across the province. Please contact us if you are able to help with this initiative.)

#### WHAT PEOPLE ARE DOING

We are learning, as a result of these Community Consultations, that, on an individual basis, many organizations have developed creative and innovative ways of addressing the food insecurity challenges of their members or clients. At first, some participants did not see the link between food security and what their organizations were doing to deal with it, but as the conversations progressed; it was wonderful to watch them make the connections! These are just some of the responses to food insecurity that our Community Consultations participants reported:

Seniors' Resource Centre:

Grocery Bus program: goes to Bidgoods 3x/week; promotes social interaction; \$8/round trip; picks up and delivers seniors at their homes

Diabetes Prevention Project

Independent Living Resource Centre:

Employment programs, budgeting programs

Dinner Club: promotes social interaction, finds accessible restaurants

Provides support and advocacy

City of St. John's Department of Recreation:

Programs send notices to parents asking them to send healthy snacks with children

Because it is a Recreation Department, staff encourages and supports physical activity, especially in children

#### CHANNAL

Provides information about food/medication interactions

Provides support and advocacy

Peer Support Program; grocery shopping with members to help them make healthy food choices

dietitian is available to help with budget, diet, cooking skills

Kilbride to Ferryland Family Resource Centre

Groups follow Canada Food Guide, and the Centre has a nutrition policy

Cooking with Kids programs

Offer sessions with nutritionist

Promote social interaction around food

The Organic Farm:

Provides nutritious meals for farm workers

Involves children in learning about farming

Co-op Program for consumers who want to buy organic produce

In addition, many of these organizations are trying to model healthy eating habits by serving nutritious foods at meetings and having healthy food choices available to members and clients at events and workshops.

Bravo!

#### ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

A second focus of our Community Consultations was to uncover some of the food security issues and challenges organizations are dealing with, and we found many! Every single participant mentioned the systemic and urgent problem of inadequate income from these sources: minimum-wage employment, Employment Insurance, and Income Support. Other issues that were raised(the list is long; there is much work ahead of us!):

There is no food bank on Southern Shore, and there are issues with the next closest food banks with regard to locations, opening hours and accessibility

Although there is lots of land on the Southern Shore, there are no community gardens there

Homecare workers for people with disabilities need more training in preparing and serving healthy foods for clients

Loss of cooking and food preparation skills; children are not learning how to cook and prepare food

Cost of nutritious foods

Nutrition Supplement is insufficient!

Social support networks are deteriorating  
Sugar/junk food marketing: social pressures  
Obesity in this province  
High cost of prescription drugs means less money is available for healthy food purchases  
1/3 of people with disabilities receive Income Support in this province  
Housing cost issues; quality of housing  
Children coming into the Community Centres and playgrounds in the mornings with chips and soft drinks (which cost less than many nutritious foods) for breakfast or morning snacks  
Social and physical exclusion of people who are poor, people with mental health challenges, people with physical challenges  
Supply management farms: could wipe out small family farms here  
Cost of school supplies means less money is available for healthy food purchases  
Priority: Income Support payments for youth is \$96/month: outrageous!

In the months to come, we will be holding many more Community Consultations, both cross-sectoral and within organizations. We will be visiting as many regions of the province as our funding permits. To include your organization, or to learn how you can get involved in the food security movement, please contact Sherril Gilbert, Project Coordinator, at [sgilbert@datamail.net](mailto:sgilbert@datamail.net) or 709-739-5775.

**Organic Food gives dramatic protection.**  
**Published by: the Halifax Health and Environmental Quarterly**

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Switching to organic foods provides children “dramatic” and immediate” protection from widely used agricultural pesticides, a recent federally funded US study concludes. Scientists from three universities tested the urine of 23 daycare and elementary students over 15 days. For the first three days and the last seven days, the children ate their normal foods. During the middle five days, organic food was substituted for most of their diet, including fruits, vegetables, juices and wheat and corn based processed items such as cereal and pasta.

The researchers studied concentration of two organophosphate pesticides, malathion and chlorpyrifos. They found that the amount of these pesticides in the children’s bodies declined substantially during the five day period when organic foods were substituted for conventional foods.

Average levels of both malathion and chlorpyrifos in the children” decreased to the nondetect levels immediately after the introduction of organic diets and remained nondetectable until the conventional diets were reintroduced, “ the researches reported.

When they ate organic foods, the children on average had zero malathion detected in their urine, with a high of seven parts per billion in one child. But when the children returned to eating conventional foods, one child has as much as 263 parts per billion and the average increased to 1.6 parts per billion.

“In conclusion,” the researches wrote, “we were able to demonstrate that an organic diet provides a dramatic and immediate protective effect against exposure to organophosphorus pesticides that are commonly used in agriculture production.”

The study is one of the first to test how pesticide exposure is affected by changing children’s diets from conventional to organic foods. The health effects of exposure to continuous, minute amounts of these pesticides found in food are largely unknown, especially for children. Research suggests that the residue may harm the developing nervous system as well as the liver.

Full study, published on line in the September 1, 2005 Environmental Health Perspectives and be found at <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/docs/2005/8418/abstract.html> ( This summary reported in UPDATE, published by the Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia, P.O. Box 31323, Halifax, NS. B3K5Y5)