



# Connecting for Food Security

## **Report from the Provincial Conference on Food Security**

World Food Day  
Thursday October 16, 2008  
Université de Moncton

The New Brunswick Food Security Action Network  
*Réseau d'action sur la sécurité alimentaire du Nouveau-Brunswick*

## Setting the Stage – Conference Background

The New Brunswick Food Security Action Network is a coalition working to “*identify priority actions related to the promotion of food security throughout New Brunswick.*” Through research, education/promotion, and community engagement the coalition works towards increasing food security for the province, as demonstrated by an increase in the number of New Brunswickers who have access to nutritious foods, an increased consumption of nutritious foods, an emphasis placed on the consumption of local foods, and a related increase in economic viability for local farms. Improved food security for New Brunswick is essential to achieve targets set out in many government departments and strategies including wellness, education, self-sufficiency, etc.

Food Security exists when **all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to safe, sufficient, culturally appropriate and nutritious food to meet dietary needs for a healthy life, in a manner that maintains human dignity and sustains our environment.** Thus, the concept of food security includes both personal issues of access to food, as well as system issues of food production and supply. Food security contributes to the physical, mental, cultural, spiritual and emotional well being of our Province’s residents.

A comprehensive, widespread strategy is required for sustainable change when addressing a complex issue such as Food Security. An effective strategy will require groups with associated goals ‘**clustering**’ and developing supporting and complimentary actions, programs and policies at all levels to create a food secure province. Thus the objectives for the Connecting for Food Security Conference were:

- To identify and explore commonalities amongst the diverse stakeholders interested in enhancing food security in New Brunswick
- To establish partnerships that will help us work together towards a common vision and common goals after the conference is completed
- To begin to build a communication network and work towards effective communication practices between stakeholders which will lead towards the development of a comprehensive strategy.
- To follow up on discussions from the June 2008 event “Creating Community Collaborations: A Rural-Urban Exchange” which took place in Sackville, NB.

The conference was designed to help participants see how they can improve food security within their communities, by providing opportunities to celebrate and build on the good work that is already taking place in many communities, and by helping participants to increase their capacity to take action:



## Invited Guests

### **Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell**

*As a family physician Dr. Trenholme Counsell practiced in Toronto and in Sackville and Port Elgin, New Brunswick. Prior to her long career in medicine, she worked as a nutritionist for the governments of New Brunswick and Ontario. First elected to the New Brunswick Legislature in 1987, she was installed as New Brunswick's 28th Lieutenant-Governor in 1997, serving until 2003. Dr. Trenholme Counsell was appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2003. She is a member of the Social, Science and Technology Committee, which has toured Canada during its study of mental health, recommending a National Mental Health Commission. She is a champion for children and literacy and in her Senate speeches Senator Trenholme Counsell focuses on early childhood development, literacy and health.*

### **Patty Williams, PhD, PDt**

*Dr. Patty Williams is an Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Human Nutrition at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, NS. She holds the Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Policy Change. Dr. Williams' work has included the establishment and coordination of the Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her research is focused on improving our understanding of what determines food security in order to inform and change policies and systems to strengthen food security.*

### **Panelists**

- Janice Kelly *Dietitian, Public Health Services, Saint John*
- Jean-Eudes Chiasson *President, NB Farmers' Union*
- Jennifer MacDonald *Board Member, Agricultural Alliance*
- Joanne Petitpas *Common Front for Social Justice*
- Kent Coates *Agricultural Producer*
- Martha MacLean *Dietitian, St. Joseph's Community Health Centre*
- Patty Williams *Researcher in Food Security, MSVU*
- Wendy McDermott *Vibrant Communities Association, Saint John*

### **Conference Facilitators**

The New Brunswick Food Security Action Network would like to thank the following people for their expert facilitation throughout the day:

- Sophie Pitre-Arsenault *Health Canada*
- Heather Gass *Public Health Agency of Canada*
- Alain Clavette *Journalist*



## Conference Presentations

### Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell

*“The food one eats, or fails to eat, is inextricably inked to one’s health, to one’s recovery in times of sickness, to one’s well-being, indeed to one’s joy of living.”* With this personal reflection on the essential role of food in every aspect of human life, the Senator opened the conference with a broad overview of the many issues affecting the food supply chain today: from listeriosis and other food-borne illnesses, to dangerously altered baby formula, the current the debate surrounding biofuels, and the rising costs of the family food basket. She called on the participants to recognize their potential role in advocating on behalf of their fellow citizens, and in guiding them as they make the best food choices for all who sit at each family table in the homes of this nation, from coast to coast.

For the full text of the Senator’s speech please refer to **Appendix A**.

### Dr. Patty Williams

Dr. Williams then presented an overview of existing research in the following areas:

- *What is food security? Food insecurity*
- *Why should this be addressed as a critical social and public health problem?*
- *What are approaches for addressing food insecurity in Canada?*
- *Building Capacity for Systems Change: The role of participatory action research*
- *Challenges and opportunities*

For the full power point presentation please refer to **Appendix B**.

## Panel Discussion

A panel discussion was held to feature voices from people who are working in or affected by many different aspects of food security. To open the discussion, panelists were asked to identify what food security is, and what it means to them personally. The following themes were identified during that discussion:

- **Income adequacy**      *Making sure all people can afford to buy the food they need.*
- **Food access**      *Ensuring that people can get to the food and that the food can get to the people. Making sure grocery stores and other food outlets are accessible by all people, regardless of their means of transportation.*
- **Food sovereignty**      *Having control over the food we eat, where it comes from, what goes into it.*
- **Food self-sufficiency**      *Access to food from close to our own communities – not relying on food from outside NB*
- **Food adequacy**      *Having enough food for all.*
- **Food safety**      *Ensuring that our food supply is safe from contaminants, etc.*

While the panel discussion was free-flowing and wide-ranging, the many issues which arose during the rest of the discussion have been grouped together under the themes identified above. For further help



in interpreting the information, many of the issues have also been grouped into “problem” and “solution” statements. Where no clear distinction was present, they have been simply listed as “issues”.

## **Income Adequacy**

### **Problems:**

- *Social support money does not cover the needs of those living in poverty*
- *We have families who are living in cars because they can't afford housing. I can't believe I am living in a country where people are dying because they don't have enough money every month to feed their families.*
- *It costs twice the amount of money for 2L of milk than for 2L of pop. I can't afford to buy milk for my family when I could buy 10L of pop for the same price as 2L of milk*
- *I don't buy my groceries at the end of the month because the prices are higher (around the time that the welfare cheques come out)*

### **Solutions:**

- *Many of us here have the luxury of deciding whether or not we will buy local foods or what ingredients we can't eat. But people who are on fixed incomes often don't have that choice. They need to purchase foods to fill the hole. We need to work collaboratively to address this issue.*
- *I always try to buy in bulk to save money*

## **Food Access**

### **Problems:**

- *2 of the grocery stores we surveyed for food costing in Saint John were Walmart and Giant Tiger. These are the only grocery stores accessible to some of the most vulnerable communities in NB. As we know they don't stock any fresh foods.*
- *Speaking for a group of single mothers, the reason we shop at Giant Tiger and Walmart is that the big grocery chains change their prices. If they offer a 2-for-1 price on something, you will find that the price is double the cost of what it was the week before. We can't afford to buy food at those stores.*
- *I grew up with a garden that was the size of this room. We experienced a sense of pride from working in that garden. Our kids are lacking that because we either don't have the money, the space, or the sense of safety to let our kids be outdoors.*

### **Solutions:**

- *I try to buy local foods and buy at local farms when I can.*
- *I grow foods in my own garden.*
- *There is a large community garden in Saint John now. We are also working at converting vacant lots to gardens as well.*
- *We're working on a community garden in the Moncton area for next summer, to be supported by United Way.*

## **Food Sovereignty**

### **Problems:**

- *Farms are getting bigger and bigger, we give more and more control to the multi-national companies*
- *80% of blueberries are grown in NS. One buyer buys all those blueberries, trucks them to Toronto, and then sells them back to stores in Atlantic Canada.*
- *We can't find local products in our stores because of many factors. For example: Large stores*



want to purchase from one vendor. It's too complicated to buy from many different local producers. They also want to have a uniform price. Consistency is the best condition for large stores. They try to create a system where nothing changes.

- Local foods have to cost more because our wages are higher. Farmers have to pay the higher wages to produce the safe, local food.
- Consumers don't always know how to find farmers to buy from.
- Some regulations prevent farmers from selling certain products directly to consumers. I know farmers who had to destroy food rather than give surpluses to food banks, etc.
- We don't have enough food processing plants here in our region. When Hub Meats closed in Moncton that meant that our cows had to travel much farther for processing, and we had no choice. How did we let this happen? Government shifted its priorities.
- Food labelling regulations do not support a local food system.
- There is not much labelling of the items (meat, produce, etc) to show where things come from.

#### **Solutions:**

- Consumers have to let the stores know that they won't buy these things. As consumers we let the stores buy all their produce from California because we buy it from them.
- We have to make choices. The person on a low income may not have choices to buy local but others in the community can make those choices.
- We can get involved in food co-ops, community gardens, etc.
- We can each help each other move forward and make positive changes in our communities
- We have to develop strategies that work for all of us (farmers, producers, front line workers, etc.) and that will challenge government to make changes.
- If there are farmers who would like to sell directly they should get the word out to us so we know how to buy their products
- The National Farmers' Union is demanding clearly labelled food for the people to give them a choice to choose where their food comes from

#### **Food Self-Sufficiency & Food Adequacy**

##### **Problems:**

- We don't grow enough of our own food here in NB (15%). Maine and Vermont lead the US in producing their own food at 20%. New Hampshire is only at 4%.
- We export 2/3 of our pigs to outside the province, and we export lots of beef and potatoes
- Another way to look at it is in terms of how many days supply we have. I don't know how much food we have here in NB but I attended a talk by Gwynne Dyer who said we used to have about 180 days of food available in the world – by fall of 2007 it was down to 45. In the US Northeast I think there is only a 3 day supply of food available at any time. This is a crazy situation!
- By November of this year Canada will be a net food importer.
- I think what we are seeing is the fall-out of changes in government thinking; from being there to support people vs. corporate interests. We need to address issues of not only food production but also food retailing and food processing.
- The government supports farmers if they are going to export a product but not for domestic production. For example, last summer there were grants for producers who were going to export (potatoes, cranberries, blueberries) but nothing for beef, pork, etc.
- We need to ensure that if some major crisis occurs to prevent us from getting food from outside our province, that we will still be able to feed our people. Fuel prices are rising, now we are heading into a global recession, we just don't know what the next 6 months will bring. I'm not sure if we'll be able



- to continue to bring food from California to the Maritimes. Our system is becoming more fragile.
- NB is still losing farms, farmers and farm land. We have lost 90% of our acreage for potatoes.
- The reality is that farmers are aging and getting out of farming.
- In the agriculture industry we are struggling. E.g. 70% of beef farmers have off-farm jobs to support their farm. Only 7% of the cost of any food goes to the farmer.
- Biofuels are not a solution for NB farmers. These crops are not feasible here – we don't have enough heat or sunshine. The production of biofuels has been a great thing for some small farmers in warmer climates, but overall, the impact that it has on food prices is devastating.
- My diesel costs in July were \$10,000. I used to use that money for my family. It is a big change and it impacts on every commodity out there.
- Fertilizer costs have gone up 500% but regulations prevent us from using farm by-products for fertilizer.
- The Department of Agriculture only has one person responsible for looking after organic farming

#### Solutions:

- Supply managed commodities can help stabilize farm incomes. If we didn't have supply management for some products we would have a lot fewer farmers than we have now. The commodities where we are most self-sufficient are those where we have supply management.
- In a supply managed commodity, we look at how much people eat and we only produce enough for what people will eat. As a farmer, if I need to buy new equipment I can budget for that over the next 5-10 years and schedule those costs into my costing because I get the same price for my milk every month. For a farmer who has a non-supply managed commodity if the price drops for hogs or beef or etc. the bank still wants their payment whether you have the money or not. It does give more stability.
- Do you see supply management systems becoming more flexible to allow more freedoms for direct selling? They are working towards changes in the industry but nothing happens overnight.

#### Food Safety

##### Issues:

- Government does not enforce regulations adequately – in Canada if a company doesn't meet the standards for processing, the companies are only charged \$5000. It's not enough of a deterrent. In the US it is 1 million dollars and in Europe it is 1/5 of their annual income.
- World health alerts were out on fungicides and heavy metals in fish [and yet] we were eating it and thinking it was Canadian because of the labelling. In the interest of corporations and the dollar we are all paying the price.
- Foods produced in New Brunswick and Canada are generally safer than foods imported from some other countries

## Digging Deeper

The facilitators pulled several main themes from the panel discussions and participants had an opportunity to comment, suggest changes, or approve the themes that were identified. The seven themes agreed on by the large group were:

1. Social Justice / Income / Resources
2. Information / Education / Communication
3. Access



4. Influencing policy
5. Collaboration at the community level
6. Consumer choice and awareness
7. Sustainability

In order to examine these themes more closely, participants were divided into groups and asked to reflect on these themes more deeply. The full notes from discussions on each theme are included in **Appendix C**. The issues have been summarized here:

### **1. Social Justice / Income / Resources**

The issues raised under this heading included the changing family dynamics of parents working outside the home and the resultant lack of time for food preparation, greater reliance on processed and ready-made foods. The gap between the rich and poor was raised, as were the links between lower incomes and poorer health outcomes. Participants indicated that there would be potential savings on health/education budgets with greater resources for low income people. Other speakers reminded the audience that social justice should apply not only to the urban poor, those who produce and process food also need to be considered when looking at social justice issues.

### **2. Information / Education / Communication**

Some themes identified here included the importance of teaching / skill development when addressing food insecurity, in addition to providing food charity (e.g. food banks). Participants identified great societal needs for education / skill development around food preparation, agriculture, food sources, nutrition, etc. Many participants commented on the need for home economics education to be revived in schools, as well as the potential for schools to impact these issues through other curricular and extracurricular activities. With respect to communication, participants highlighted the need to involve all stakeholders and all levels of society in addressing this issue, as well as the potential benefit of strong non-traditional partnerships. It would be very helpful to raise awareness of what it is like to live in poverty.

### **3. Access**

Themes identified under access included the idea that healthy foods need to be available everywhere, and that cost is often a barrier for families in purchasing healthy foods. Many innovative systems were proposed to improve access to healthy foods such as: community supported agriculture, farmers' markets, increased availability of local foods in grocery stores. The current trend of grocery stores moving out of the downtown core was raised, which leaves many people living in the city centres without affordable access to food. It was mentioned that if initiatives aimed at increasing access are going to be successful, the community must take ownership.

### **4. Influencing policy**

Ideas around influencing policy centered around the need for a collective, passionate voice to keep the issues at the forefront. Participants felt that the issues around food security are not well enough understood by the general public and that raising awareness is a very important first step. It was felt that people need to see how this issue touches them personally. A potential tool for helping with this work was identified as the "Thought About Food Workbook". Participants identified the need for people to work together on this issue, across many different sectors (including health, agriculture, natural resources, social justice, etc.). Communication between various people working





on this issue was identified as an important issue to be addressed. The complexity of the issue was mentioned as a barrier to having decision makers take positive action. NB specific research is needed to help people understand the issues.

**5. Collaboration at the community level**

Participants identified this as a crucial step for success on this issue. Identification of community assets and key players is an important step and will identify resources to draw on to work towards common solutions. The group felt that this is an issue that will draw community members together because it affects everyone. They felt that decision makers had to be part of the solution, and that solutions could be found that would be win-win for all members of the community. Participants identified the need for improved collaboration and coordination for this issue in the province, and an infrastructure to make that happen.

**6. Consumer choice and awareness**

The potential for consumers to influence public and organizational policy with their dollar was discussed. Increased consumer demand for local foods would encourage retailers to stock more local foods, thereby providing additional markets for NB farmers and helping to strengthen the local economy. A greater awareness of the real costs of food production, as well as the environmental, nutritional and economic impacts of cheap foods may encourage consumers to make more positive choices.

**7. Sustainability**

Participants referred to the importance of considering both economic and environmental sustainability and the need to leave a healthy legacy for future generations. Producing and distributing foods locally is beneficial for the environment and the economy.

**Appendix C** is a compilation of all the comments that were written on each theme.



## Moving into Action

The final activity of the afternoon was a small group exercise where participants were asked to reflect on and share what **actions** they could take or contribute to, both individually and at a community level. Actions identified are listed below.

### Personal Actions

#### **Buy local:**

- *Buy local foods more often*
- *Ask for local foods in the grocery store*
- *Encourage others to buy local produce*
- *Purchase at farmers markets*
- *Buy local foods / support local industries / be more implicated in my community*
- *Buy more local products, freeze them to extend their freshness*

#### **Get active:**

- *Plant a garden*
- *Garden ecologically*
- *Volunteer with a CSA\* farm or a community kitchen*
- *better planning to prevent wasted food*
- *share local produce and recipes*
- *Encourage my clients to see home economist to learn how to stretch food dollars and improve cooking skills*

\*CSA: Community Supported Agriculture

#### **Raise awareness:**

- *Be more aware of what I eat and where it comes from*
- *Talk about the issue more with family and friends*
- *teach grandchildren about where food comes from*
- *Get kids involved in gardening*
- *Let people know where I buy food*
- *Advocate*
- *Bring info back to the classroom and generate discussion to promote awareness of the necessity to do something*
- *Get involved*

#### **Learn more:**

- *Seek to gain a greater awareness of how deep and complex the issue is in my own professional networks*
- *Find out more about where to buy local foods*
- *Learn how to support local farmers and local agriculture*
- *Be more aware of what food is available at the food bank*



## Community Actions

### **Get active:**

- *Bring together city residents to develop community gardens in vacant lots. Look for useable urban space. Work towards participation of both youth and seniors in community gardens projects*
- *Help to organize a community kitchen*
- *Work closely with local food bank & develop teaching / education sessions for food bank clients*
- *Explore purchasing from local suppliers for food purchasing club*
- *get more community based programs together*
- *Garden at the school*
- *work together to lower food cost*
- *To do more networking know what services are available identify what is missing (ex. Community gardens, teaching classes)*
- *look into local food buying group*
- *Personal gardens barter system*
- *Work towards finding cold storage for the food bank once storage space is available approach farmers / gardeners for extra food*

### **Education:**

- *Share my knowledge of cooking and gardening within my community*
- *Courses, seminars, presentations for high schools*
- *Develop educational resources*

### **Advocacy:**

- *Stimulate local municipal government and community to the seriousness of food security*  
*Government should experience poverty*
- *More concrete actions rather than continue talking*
- *focus on social change with policy making*

### **Capacity building:**

- *Build assets with children and youth – this leads to healthy, caring, responsible adults who will be empowered and value the importance of this issue.*  
[www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

### **Workplace:**

- *Explore the possibility of getting more involved with food security projects in my job*
- *Talk to my manager about the importance of food security and how it relates to our work*
- *Educate through my employment to try to be more involved*



**Networking:**

- *Form or join a collaborative group of stakeholders interested in food security to continue discussions and develop more localized solutions*
- *Establish one or join an existing one and help advocate for community/local change*
- *Join NBFSAN - share stories with other communities of our successes and failures in building a local food system*
- *Join a local activist group*
- *Get the community on board*
- *Organize discussion group in my community*
- *Organize idea-exchange between different community members and different communities*
- *Help foster partnerships that increase access to food, access to services that can help individuals become self-sufficient*
- *Establish partnerships*
- *Establish a food security regional committee in our region*
- *Talking to members of our community about the food security issues we face – discussion*
- *Share info from today's workshop with co-workers and others in community*

**Raise awareness:**

- *Talk to my peers about food security issues*
- *Municipal presentations across province based on information gathered today inclusive of diverse stakeholders of issues of food security*
- *Educate community on what food security is and why it is important*
- *Promote, support breastfeeding as part of food security*
- *do a write-up in my local newspaper*
- *Raise awareness about the issues among colleagues and management at my workplace*
- *Discuss about food security within our community using the media, workshops, committees (health), municipal and provincial*
- *Talking to government officials about our food security concerns*



## NBFSAN – Next Steps

The New Brunswick Food Security Network will build on this event by continuing to develop and strengthen relationships with participants and other stakeholders.

Intended follow up actions will include:

- **Building new links within the food supply chain** – working to improve the understanding of the issues and helping to strengthen the local food economy
- **Increasing organizational capacity** – working to build capacity within communities to include innovative, community development approaches to food security, rather than a simply implementing emergency food supplies for hungry people
- **Continuing to support outreach and education campaigns** – that mutually support the common vision and goals
- **Strengthening information exchange** – creating an effective means of communication with all stakeholders – working towards effective networking and communication
- **Ongoing development of the network** – working with stakeholders to secure resources for a support staff position

For more information on the work of the New Brunswick Food Security Action Network please contact:

## Contacting NBFSAN

NBFSAN is a network of individuals, and of community and government organizations. For more information about the work of the NBFSAN please contact:

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