



Healthy Food for All
access | availability | affordability

Submission on Budget 2008

Making food more affordable and accessible for low-income families

- a) Address the issue of rising food costs in the economy
- b) Improve access to a variety of food retail outlets for low-income families, including the promotion of community food initiatives in disadvantaged areas
- c) Increase adult welfare payments by €20 per week and child welfare payments by between €3 and €8 per week (higher increase for older children)
- d) Ensure all school children have daily access to a nutritious school lunch, including a drink and an item of fruit, as part of a national healthy eating strategy for schools
- e) Provide additional resources for school food initiatives which target low-income children, to meet the non-food costs associated with providing free school meals.

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www.healthyfoodforall.com¹

1. Introduction

Healthy Food for All is a multi-agency initiative seeking to promote access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups². It seeks to address the problem of food poverty, which arises from structural constraints in the consumption of healthy diet, such as cost, access problems and social factors.

2. Rising food costs

This document is framed in the context of the rising cost of food. Ireland has the second highest food costs in Europe³ and there is evidence that food costs will rise in the future. The repeal of the Groceries Order has failed to deliver any significant reductions in the price of food items. Global factors such as climate change policies, sustained rises in energy prices, biofuel production, serious droughts, growing demands for meat and dairy in Asia, high grain prices have affected, and will continue to affect the cost of food. We know from our collective work that consuming and sharing food is problematic for those on low incomes living in areas with poor service provision and inadequate shopping facilities.

The high cost of food has a negative impact on low-income households in the following ways:

- Low-income households spend proportionately more of their weekly income on food than those from other socio-economic groups (Poorest 20% of households spend 25% of weekly expenditure on food compares with average for all households of 18%).⁴
- Many of the shops that are accessible to low-income families, especially in disadvantaged areas, are more expensive (eg the symbol groups)
- The cost of a healthy diet, as recommended by public health policy, is often unaffordable for low-income families⁵

3. Dietary inequalities and groups at risk of food poverty

There are clear links between income status and quality of diet in Ireland. People in the lower income deciles eat less fruit and vegetables; more processed foods and consume more saturated fats. This same cohort is less likely to meet the dietary guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Children even though they spend more on food as a proportion of their income.⁶

The 290,000 people living in consistent poverty can be seen to be at risk of food poverty. This means they are living on a low income and are deprived of one or more basic necessities, including various food-related items.

The 2005 **EU-SILC** figures on food-specific items show:

- 11% of the population went without a substantial meal on at least one day in the past two weeks
- 11% were unable to afford a roast once a week
- 9% were unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every 2nd day.
- 30% were unable to afford to have family or friends around for a meal or drink once a month

There is a clear link between these indicators of food poverty and income poverty, as people below 60% of median income are four times more likely to experience food poverty than better-off people.

Crosscare provided **101,400** nutritious meals to those experiencing difficulties accessing a healthy diet through their food centres in 2006.

The problem of food poverty is even more acute for children⁷:

- 14% of children never have breakfast during the weekdays
- 17% of children go to bed or school hungry because there is no food at home
- Children, particularly girls, from the lower social classes less likely to consume the recommended five-a-day portions of fruit and vegetables.
- Children from the lower social classes are more likely to consume soft drinks.

Difficulties in accessing food have knock-on implications for health status, and for educational attainment, particularly for children.

4. Actions to make food more affordable and accessible in Budget 2008

The cost of food

- a) Address the issue of rising food costs in the economy
- b) Improve access to a variety of food retail outlets for low-income families, including the promotion of community food initiatives in disadvantaged areas

Income support for low-income families

- c) Increase adult welfare payments by €20 per week and child welfare payments by between €3 and €8 per week (higher increase for older children)

Healthy eating strategy for school

Research shows that schools are an important setting in obtaining a healthy diet. The National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005 recommended the following:

“The school/education setting is important because the majority of children are in school for at least their first two decades and so they can be accessed for health education and promotion”.

Healthy Food for All recommends government:

- d) Ensure all school children have daily access to a nutritious school lunch, including a drink and an item of fruit, as part of a national healthy eating strategy for schools
- e) Provide additional resources for school food initiatives which target low-income children, to meet the non-food costs associated with providing free school meals.

This would include

- Provide kitchens and canteens in disadvantaged schools
- Assist with non-food costs of providing food in schools
- Streamline different school meal schemes into one enhanced programme
- Encourage schools to develop consistent healthy eating policies in schools
- Appoint **2 to 4** HFfA community dietitians to:
 - a)** *develop nutritional standards and take an active role in implementing a quality nutritious School Food Programme, to facilitate the development of Healthy Eating Policies in schools and to co-ordinate linkages with the forthcoming National Nutrition Policy.*
 - b)** link the provision of food with a wider healthy school policy and to integrate nutrition education into the curriculum (SPHE Programme).

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¹ **Partnership Agencies:** Armagh & Dungannon Health Action Zone, BordBia, Combat Poverty Agency, Community Dietitian Service, Clondalkin Health Initiative, Crosscare, Department of Health & Children, Dublin City Council, Family Support Agency, Focus Ireland, Food Safety Authority Ireland, Limerick Food Partnership, Northern Ireland Public Health Alliance, Population Health (HSE), SafeFood, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Tallaght Partnership, UCD.

² **Funders:** Dept. of Social & Family Affairs, Population Health (HSE), Combat Poverty Agency, SafeFood, Food Safety Authority Ireland.

³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-07-090/EN/KS-SF-07-090-EN.PDF

⁴ Household Budget Survey (July 2007; 16)

http://www.cso.ie/surveysandmethodologies/documents/word_docs/Expanding_HBS_Jul_06.doc

⁵ Standard of Healthy Living on the Island of Ireland (safefood; 2005)

http://www.safefood.eu/uploads/HealthyLivingOnTheIOI_Summary.pdf

⁶ Friel, S. and Conlon, C. (2004). *Food Poverty and Policy*. Combat Poverty Agency, Crosscare and Society of St Vincent de Paul: Dublin.

⁷ The Irish Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study 2006