



Healthy Food for All

access | availability | affordability

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GROUP CALLS FOR NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY TO HELP END FOOD POVERTY WHICH AFFECTS ALMOST A HALF MILLION PEOPLE IN IRELAND

Food poverty on the rise amongst children with one in five going to bed or school hungry

Expansion of Breakfast Clubs and Community Food Initiatives also sought as key components in effort to eradicate food poverty

Healthy Food for All – an all-island charity seeking to address food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups – has today called for the development of a national food strategy to help tackle the issue of food poverty. The organisation’s first national conference held in Dublin heard that almost half a million people in the country are affected by food poverty which is defined as the inability to afford or access healthy food.

Healthy Food for All’s outgoing Chairperson, Marjo Moonen, said that in 2012 the Department of Social Protection estimated that 10% of the population are affected by food poverty up from 7% in 2009. However, certain households are more vulnerable particularly unemployed households and lone-parent households with more than one child

“Food poverty affects people in a number of ways. Clearly it restricts people’s ability to consume a well-balanced diet which leads to increased rates of diet-related chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, obesity and certain cancers. Children are particularly vulnerable to food poverty which has long-term consequences on their future health, education and economic outcomes. Unfortunately, it looks as if food poverty amongst children is on the rise. In 2010, one in five children (21%) went to school or to bed hungry because there was not enough food in the home up from 16.6% in 2006. Over one in eight children (13%) in Ireland never eat breakfast on a weekday.”

Marjo Moonen said that Healthy Food for All is calling for the development of a national food strategy – governing all aspects of the food system – as a key

component in the effort to eradicate food poverty. According to Ms Moonen, one of the key challenges for an Irish national food strategy would be to ensure the affordability, accessibility and availability of healthy food to all members of society.

“A priority of the strategy must be to ensure the sustainability of the food system, enabling people to eat a healthy and sustainable diet, and ensuring the development of a competitive and profitable food system. The strategy must be developed in partnership with the food and farming industries, consumer groups, the community and voluntary sector, international organisations, business and the public.”

Marjo Moonen pointed out that Healthy Food for All is also recommending the expansion of a number of local measures – specifically the School Meals Programme and Community Food Initiatives – as key components of the effort to tackle the issue of food poverty.

“Because of children’s particular vulnerability to food poverty, Healthy Food for All would like to see an expansion of the School Meals Programme – which is supported by the Department of Social Protection – targeted at those most in need. In addition, we are looking for increased investment by the Department in a National Programme of Breakfast Clubs which would support 100 schools over a three year period.”

Marjo Moonen explained why Breakfast Clubs are so important.

“Breakfast Clubs have a lot of benefits and one of the critical ones is that they provide a more equal playing field so that all children can get the most out of the school day. The evidence shows that they not only improve nutritional intake they also increase attendance rates and punctuality, improve concentration, develop social skills around eating, provide schools with an opportunity to engage with families on an informal basis and support parental involvement.”

Healthy Food for All is also looking for enhanced investment from the new EU Food Aid Programme to fund 25 Community Food Initiatives around the country.

“Community Food Initiatives are projects that improve the availability, affordability and accessibility of healthy food for low income groups at local level. They are projects that empower people to address the food needs within their own community and examples include community gardens, local food co-ops, community cafés, cookery classes and supermarket tours.

“Healthy Food for All currently manages ten Community Food Initiatives around the country. They operate on very small budgets but they do amazing work and we know from direct experience that they have a life-changing impact on those who take part in them,” Marjo Moonen concluded.

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