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## **GROUP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE EXTRA €1 MILLION IN 2016 TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL FOOD INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS FOOD POVERTY**

The organisation, *Healthy Food for All*, has called on the Government to provide an extra €1 million in 2016 to support Community and School Food Initiatives to help address the problem of food poverty which affects some 600,000 people in Ireland. Half of this additional funding would help to establish at least one Community Food Initiative in each county and the other half to ensuring that all DEIS schools can provide school meals.

*Healthy Food for All's* Project Co-Ordinator, Sinead Keenan, explained that the number of people experiencing food poverty has been rising in Ireland.

“The latest data released by the Department of Social Protection earlier this year shows that 600,000 people in Ireland (13.2% of the population) were experiencing food poverty in 2013 up from 450,000 (10%) in 2010.<sup>(1)</sup> The research shows that certain types of households are more vulnerable to food poverty with 30% of lone-parent households food poor in 2013 – an increase from 23% in 2010. Unemployed households are the most food poor.”

Ms Keenan said that on average, low-income households would have to spend one quarter of their budget to achieve a healthy basket of food when shopping.<sup>(3)</sup>

“Food prices in Ireland remain above the European average<sup>(2)</sup> and the cost of food varies depending on access to different food outlets. Lack of access to multiple or discount supermarkets means food costs are significantly higher if bought in a local convenience store.”

In this regard Sinead Keenan pointed out that:

The cost of feeding a teenager is €49 per week, double the cost of feeding a pre-schooler (€24) and €12-€13 per week more expensive than for a primary school child;<sup>(3)</sup>

It is up to ten times cheaper to provide calories in the form of unhealthy foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar than it is the form of healthy foods such as fresh fruit, vegetables, lean meat and fish.<sup>(4)</sup>

“To help tackle this problem, *Healthy Food for All* is calling for an investment of €500,000 in 2016, to help ensure that each county has at least one Community Food Initiative — there are currently 17 around the country. These Initiatives help to improve the availability, affordability and accessibility of healthy food for low income groups at local level and they empower people to identify and address the food needs within their own community through

community gardens, local cooperatives, community cafés, cookery/nutrition classes, budgeting and supermarket tours.”

Sinead Keenan said that food poverty is a serious problem for children and young people with one in five going to school or bed hungry because there is not enough food in their home. Ms Keenan explains that schools provide an important platform to tackle food poverty among children. However, an evaluation of a *Healthy Food for All* Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs — attended by 100 children — highlighted a number of challenges in relation to school facilities and infrastructure.

“The Government is providing almost €40 million this year under the School Meals Programme to 850 DEIS schools. However, over 100 of these schools cannot avail of these monies because they don’t have the necessary facilities in place to prepare and serve food nor the trained personnel. This is why we’re asking the Government – through the Department of Education and Skills – to provide a once-off investment package of €500,000 in 2016 which would ensure that all DEIS schools have the required infrastructure in place to provide a healthy meal to their students,” Sinead Keenan concluded.

## References

<sup>1</sup> *Social Inclusion Monitor 2013*, Department of Social Protection (2015)

<sup>2</sup> *Comparative price levels of consumer goods and services*, Eurostat (2015)

<sup>3</sup> *The Cost of a Healthy Food Basket in the Republic of Ireland*, safefood (2015)

<sup>4</sup> *The Affordability of Healthy Eating for low-income households*, Healthy Food for All (2009)

## Notes to Editors

*Healthy Food for All* is an all-island charity established to eradicate food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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