



Healthy Food for All

access | availability | affordability

2006 – 2016: A Legacy to Address Food Poverty in Ireland





What is Healthy Food for All?

Healthy Food for All (HFfA) was an all-island charity addressing food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. From 2006 to 2016 Healthy Food for All set out to provide a solution oriented approach to addressing food poverty.

Recognising the need to address the issue at both local and national level HFfA designed the model of Community and School Food Initiatives that supports low-income families to address their own food needs.

Simultaneously we raised awareness about the structural barriers that limit people's food choices. We demonstrated the relationship between food poverty and other policy concerns such as health inequalities, welfare adequacy, educational disadvantage, food production and distribution, retail planning and food safety.

The Issue



Food poverty in 2016

One in eight people in Ireland are living in food poverty, which is defined as the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of the affordability of and access to food. (Department of Social Protection 2015)

One in five children go to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food in the home. (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children 2015)

Research shows socially-disadvantaged households consume less nutritionally-balanced diets and suffer from higher rates of diet-related

chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity and certain cancers at a younger age.

Food poverty is a form of social exclusion and social injustice. It is a multi-dimensional issue linked to a variety of factors which can be divided into four main themes:

- **Accessibility**
- **Availability**
- **Affordability**
- **Awareness**

What We Achieved

Policy and Advocacy

Food poverty is linked to a number of critical public policy issues. Through its advocacy and awareness raising work, Healthy Food for All succeeded in placing the issue firmly on the national policy agenda and it has been recognised in key policy documents.

We have undertaken research on food poverty and have a strong record in making policy recommendations to government departments on how to support low-income households access a healthy diet through our pre-budget and policy submissions. In June 2015, following a submission by Healthy Food for All, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concluded that the Irish Government needed to expedite the adoption of a National Action Plan on Food Security and Nutrition. HfFA has been instrumental in inducing other NGOs to incorporate a food poverty focus in their work and a number of national organisations have taken up this issue.

"We weren't talking about food poverty until HfFA joined the membership and educated us on what we need to do"

**Tanya Ward, Director,
Children's Rights Alliance**

Ultimately, Ireland needs a National Food Strategy to ensure

the affordability, accessibility and availability of healthy food to all members of society. Such a strategy must involve all the relevant government departments and state agencies and be developed in partnership with the food and farming industries, consumer groups, health professionals and the community and voluntary sector.

Community Food Initiatives

People who are living on a low income encounter a number of significant barriers to eating healthily. Healthy Food for All developed the Community Food Initiative model to help increase access to safe, sustainable and nutritious food. We published A Good Practice Guide for Community Food Initiatives which was designed as a practical resource for community groups setting up a food project.

We established 17 Community Food Initiatives across the island of Ireland. Through these projects thousands of people living in disadvantaged communities engaged in growing, cooking and nutrition courses.

These projects had a substantial impact on the social capital in their areas, often creating a beautiful garden, accessible to the whole community, in spaces that had previously been a site of anti-social behaviour. We also ran a series of

regional training events for community groups across the island of Ireland to build their capacity to address local food needs.

"Thanks to HfFA my kids love picking tomatoes from the polytunnel in the community garden"

Parent

Planning is critically important in creating healthier environments and food needs to be on the agenda of local and central government.

Adequate funding is another key issue. The community and voluntary sector, having lost up to 30% of their revenue, is operating in a very difficult field. There is a need for a discrete national funding stream that is channelled through the sector to support community groups address local food needs.

School Food Initiatives

HfFA identified schools as an ideal setting to address food poverty among children. Good food and nutrition is critical in childhood and adolescence and a key determinant of future health.

We published two good practice guides for School Food Initiatives and Breakfast Clubs to support school food provision. We established a Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs in north Dublin which was attended by 120 children daily. We also undertook a research project on schools' support needs in setting up a breakfast club. This study was the first of its kind in

"Thanks to the breakfast club a child regularly late for school is now first at the school gates at 8am."

Principal

Ireland and made recommendations to expand the School Meals Programme, improve school infrastructure and provide training support for school staff. HfFA successfully advocated for increases in the budget for the School Meals Programme which increased from €4 million to €42 million between 2006 and 2016.

While this budgetary increase is to be welcomed there is a need for greater policy coherence across the five government departments involved in school food provision. There needs to be greater joined up action between these departments to build on synergies and to ensure that the outcomes of the programme are efficient and effective, that the children involved receive nutritious and quality food and that flexible and creative supports are available to encourage schools to participate.



Call to Action



The election of the 32nd Dáil, the putting in place of a new programme for government and the centenary celebration of 1916 give us an opportunity for a new vision for the period ahead.

Over the next five years, Healthy Food for All is asking advocates to build on our work over the last 10 years by highlighting the link between food and the obesity crisis, mental health issues, access to education, income adequacy, well-being and the creation of healthy environments.

Specifically, we are asking advocates and policy makers to commit to the following five actions over the next five years:

1. National Food and Nutrition Strategy

We need a national food and nutrition strategy that ensures the affordability, accessibility and availability of healthy food to all

people in Ireland. Such a strategy must involve all the relevant Government Departments and be developed in partnership with the food and farming industries, consumer groups, the community and voluntary sector, international organisations, business and the public. Those who experience food poverty must be centrally engaged in the development of Ireland's National Food and Nutrition Strategy.

2. Maintain and highlight trends in Food Poverty annually

Healthy Food for All was involved in the development of the first headline food poverty indicator, published in 2012 showing that 450,000 people in Ireland were experiencing food poverty at that time. This figure increased to 600,000 in 2015. The Department of Social Protection includes this data in its annual Social Inclusion Monitor. This indicator can help us monitor progress on tackling food poverty as well as hold the government accountable for measures it takes to address this issue. This data needs to be investigated in the context of the implementation of national policies on planning, health, education and income adequacy.

3. Develop and deliver on a National Food in Schools Strategy

While the budget for the School Meals Programme has increased our research shows that schools still need additional support in terms of capital funding costs and training for staff. Government's work on school food provision is carried out through five departments and this should be coordinated through one lead agency or department. Finally, measures to address food poverty among children need to be rights-based and underpinned by the State's international legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfill children's rights.

4. Develop a funding stream for community food-related projects

A five-year investment of €2.5 million from Government in Community Food Initiatives is needed so there is at least one such Initiative in every county. Community Food Initiatives improve the availability and accessibility of healthy food for low income groups at local level through community gardens, cookery/nutrition classes, community cafes, supermarket tours and budgeting courses.

5. Planning at national and local government level includes requirements for a range of healthy food outlets

National and local authorities should include provision for access to healthy food in relevant planning decisions. In addition they should implement a No Fry Zone and safeguard our school children from future exposure to fast food outlets.



Leaving a Legacy

Website

Through all of its work HfFA has been committed to the development of Community and School Food Initiatives and to providing information on food poverty related issues. We are making our body of work available after the close of the organisation as a tool for anyone with an interest in food poverty to access.

To this end, all of our research and policy documents as well as our Good Practice Guides are available for download at www.healthyfoodforall.com.



Thanking our Partners

We extend our thanks and gratitude to the diverse range of partners we have worked with over the lifetime of the organisation – many of whom are continuing the work we started. As food poverty is a multi-dimensional issue, it requires a continuation of this type of cross-sectoral work if it is to be tackled.

We would like to thank in particular our funders Department of Social Protection, the HSE and safefood.



www.healthyfoodforall.com

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