

Nutritious Food Basket

The Cost of Eating Well Report 2006



Purpose of the Report

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a standardized food costing tool that measures the cost of eating well. Every year the Sudbury & District Health Unit (SDHU) uses the NFB to write a Cost of Eating Well report. The report highlights the barriers to achieving community food security within the Sudbury and Manitoulin area.

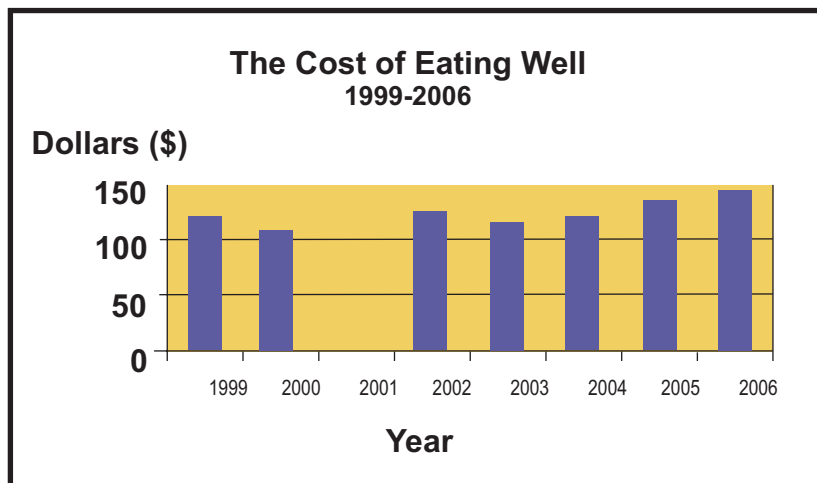
“Community food security exists when all citizens access a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance and equal access for everyone,”
Community Nutritionist Council (CNC) of British Columbia, 2004.

2006 Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results

In June 2006 the Sudbury & District Health Unit used the NFB to carry out pricing in 10 grocery stores across the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts. Sixty-six food items are included in the Nutritious Food Basket. The lowest cost for each food is recorded. The prices from all stores are averaged through a software program supplied by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

A key finding from the 2006 survey is that the average weekly food cost for a family of four is \$139.93 (\$605.90 per month). Although there are limitations to comparing NFB results from one year to the next, there has been an increasing trend over the last three years (Figure 1). The 2006 findings represent a 8.7% increase (\$11.20) in weekly food costs over 2005. The average weekly food cost for a family of four in the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts has varied from 1999 to 2006 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The average weekly food cost for a family of four in the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts 1999-2006



Limitation: Caution should be used when interpreting any apparent trend in the NFB index (or derivatives) across multiple years. A lack of standardized method to select participating retailers in a representative fashion limits the comparability of the index from year to year. For example:

- The number of stores included in the costing varies from year to year.
- The rural areas chosen for costing and the stores chosen within the rural area varies from year to year.
- The stores are not randomly selected.
- The market shares of the stores are not taken into account.

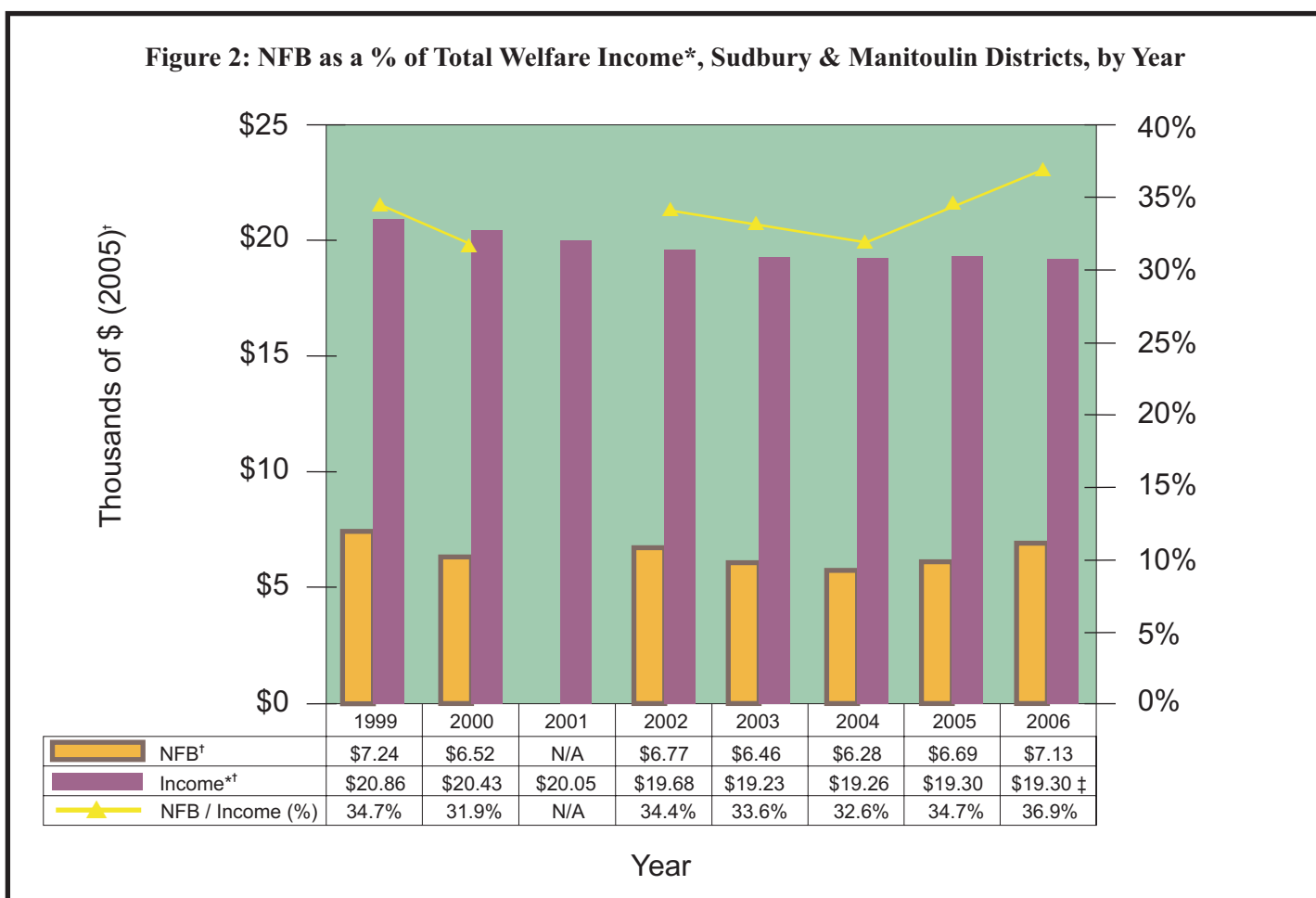
Implications of the Cost of Eating Well Report 2006 Results

Rising food costs are a potentially significant barrier to achieving food security. This is a particular risk for those individuals and households whose economic means are more limited. In the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts, 15% of all households meet the Statistics Canada definition of low income (RRED, 2004), and are therefore more vulnerable to food insecurity.

Low and fixed income groups are at particular risk for food insecurity, including:

- Individuals and families receiving Ontario Works (OW)
- Individuals who are part of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- Individuals and families earning minimum wage
- Individuals receiving Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Support
- Individuals living in rural areas
- Individuals and households affected by the Provincial Management of the National Child Benefit (“clawback”)

Figure 2: NFB as a % of Total Welfare Income*



* Total welfare incomes include basic social assistance and additional benefits from provincial and territorial governments, federal and provincial child benefits, GST and HST credits and provincial tax credits. The amount shown is for a family of two adults and two children. *Source: National Council of Welfare (2006) Welfare Incomes 2005. p. 64.*

† All dollar figures have been adjusted to their 2005 real values with the Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html

‡ 2006 Total Welfare Income was not available. It is therefore assumed to be the same as in 2005, thus excluding the Federal *Universal Child Care Benefit* (UCCB). Because this taxable benefit became effective mid-year (July 1, 2006) and is limited to families with children 6 years of age and under, it has not been considered in the 2006 NFB report.

Limitation: Caution should be used when interpreting any apparent trend in the NFB index (or derivatives) across multiple years. A lack of standardized method to select participating retailers in a representative fashion limits the comparability of the index from year to year.

Recommendations to the Sudbury and Manitoulin Community

1. Take a healthy community food systems approach.

- Community food insecurity is a serious public health issue (OPHA FSWG, 2002). To achieve community food security, a healthy community food systems approach is needed. The healthy community food systems approach looks beyond individual eating behaviours and thinks about the bigger food system (Xuereb, et al., 2005). For example, it looks to support local food producers through Farmers' Markets and Good Food Box programs. It aims to support increased access to fresh vegetables and fruit through salad bar programs in schools and community gardens.

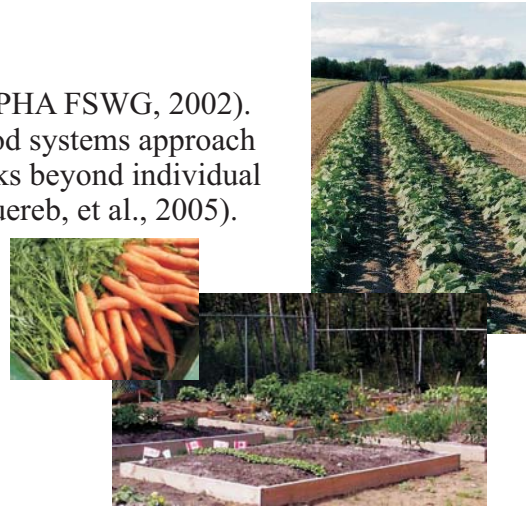
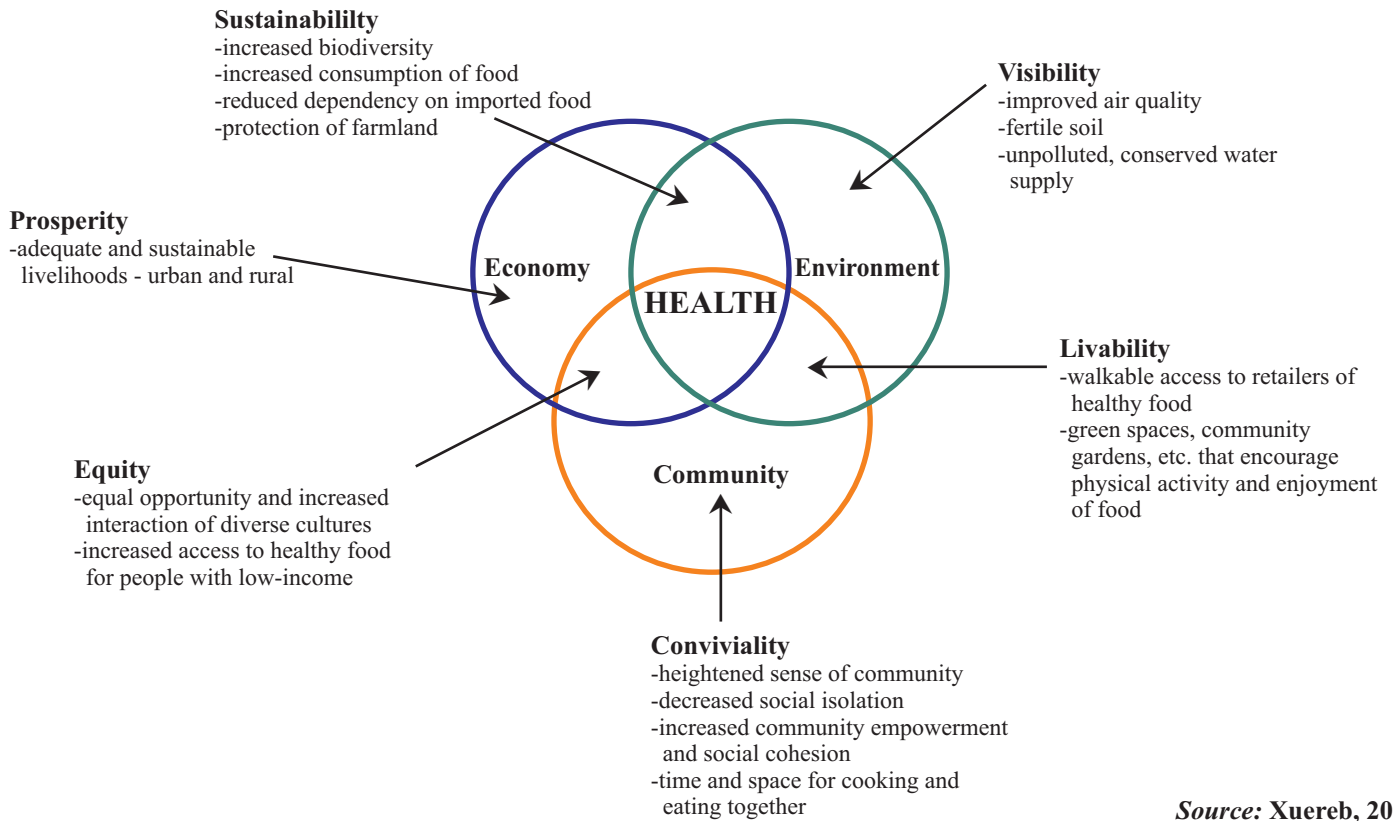


Figure 3: Applying a Community Food Systems Approach to a Healthy Communities Model



Source: Xuereb, 2006



2. Continue to support the City of Greater Sudbury (CGS) Food Charter.

- To date the CGS Food Charter has been adopted by the Sudbury & District Board of Health, the City of Greater Sudbury, the municipalities of Killarney and of St. Charles and by the Township of Tehkummah on Manitoulin Island.

Action Items

1. Population Health and Wellness

A healthy food system makes sure that everyone can afford to buy the food they need to eat well (Xuereb, 2005). Adequate income, employment, housing and transportation policies that ensure food accessibility and availability to all citizens is an objective of the CGS Food Charter.

- Call on the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Ministry of Health Promotion to assess the adequacy of all social assistance rates from a health perspective and communicate this within government.
- Call on the Ministry of Labour to use provincial NFB data to ensure adequate minimum wage rates.



2. Community Development

A healthy food system makes sure healthy food choices are accessible to everyone (Xuereb, 2005). Support community-based food programs, such as community gardens, community kitchens, student nourishment programs and Good Food Box programs.

The **Good Food Box** program runs like a large buying club with centralized buying and coordination. Individuals place orders for boxes with volunteer coordinators in their neighbourhood and receive a box brimming with fresh, often locally grown, produce (FoodShare, 2006).

3. Invest in the Regional Food System

A healthy food system protects rural communities and culture (Xuereb, 2005). A regionally-based food system is an objective of the CGS Food Charter.

- Promote and support farm-to-school programs, Farmers' Markets, farm-gate sales and local food outlets.
- Encourage the local food processing industry.

4. Develop a Sustainable Food System

A healthy, sustainable food system will have a diverse agricultural economy, linked with local food needs and markets. The CGS Food Charter supports activities that preserve biodiversity and natural resources and increase awareness of global environmental issues.

- Support composting and recycling programs.
- Support regional crop varieties.
- Support local food production.
 - ◆ A more locally-based food system will reduce food miles. Food miles is the distance food travels from field to table. Longer food miles add significant amounts of carbon dioxide to the air that contribute to climate change (Sustain, 2006). Longer food miles also could increase the risk of food spoilage and contamination (CNC, 2004).

Conclusion

A key finding from the 2006 Nutritious Food Basket survey is that the average weekly cost of food for a family of four is \$139.93 (\$605.90 per month). Although there are limitations to comparing NFB results from one year to the next, there has been an increasing trend over the last three years. The 2006 findings represent a 8.7% increase (\$11.20) in weekly food costs over 2005. Rising food costs are a potentially significant barrier to achieving food security in the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts.

For more information, call (705) 522-9200, ext. 288.

References

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