



PRESS RELEASE

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Healthy Food Must be Made More Accessible for Low-Income Groups – HFfA

- New guide aims to improve consumption of healthy food for low-income groups -

Eating healthy food should not be the preserve of the well-off. That's according to Healthy Food for All (HFfA), which today (18.10.10) launched a guide aimed at promoting healthier eating in disadvantaged communities.

The guide – 'A Good Practice Guide for Community Food Initiatives' – provides advice on how to set up community food projects that would improve the consumption of healthy food amongst low-income groups. Examples of community food initiatives include food cooperatives; community cafés, food-growing projects; breakfast and after-school clubs; and community-based training courses in nutrition and healthy eating.

Speaking at the launch of the guide today, Marjo Moonen, Chair of HFfA, said all communities should have access to healthy foods at prices they can afford.

"Research shows the poorer you are, the more likely you are to experience bad health, and food and nutrition are key determinants of health" she said. "We know the greatest obstacles to accessing a healthy diet are shortage of money and the cost of nutritionally adequate food. Community food initiatives aim to address these obstacles. Essentially, they promote good health by making it easier for people to make healthy food choices."

According to HFfA, there are a number of reasons why certain communities experience high levels of food poverty.

"Those affected may lack suitable cooking and storage equipment; there may be no local shops selling affordable food; transport to shops may be inadequate; or people may lack the relevant knowledge and skills," said Ms. Moonen. "Food poverty is a growing problem, and we believe it will only be solved through a combination of government policy changes and bottom-up approaches to food provision and consumption.

"Community food initiatives can combat food poverty by making good-quality, affordable food more accessible to local communities. They can also address gaps in dietary knowledge and skills, and improve the quality and extent of food availability in local areas. For example, some community food initiatives assist local residents to grow their own fruit and vegetables; others provide training for parents in how to prepare healthy family meals on a low budget.

"Community food initiatives have positive economic impacts, as well as the obvious health benefits. They stimulate economic activity within local communities and support local food suppliers and producers. They can also lead to environmental improvements: transforming a patch of waste-ground into a community garden, for example, means locals benefit not only from the healthy food produced but also from a greener and more aesthetically pleasing environment."

Supporting local communities to address their food needs is more urgent than ever before, according to HFfA: approximately 15 per cent of the Irish population currently experience some type of food deprivation and, amongst those on low incomes, this figure rises to 35 per cent. Furthermore, research shows that two out of three Irish adults are now at an unhealthy weight; one in four is obese; and one in four seven-year-olds is overweight.

"The obesity epidemic currently being experienced here – and throughout the developed world – disproportionately affects the poor and disadvantaged," said Marjo Moonen. "Low-income households spend a higher proportion of their incomes on food, but have greater difficulties accessing healthy, affordable options. Even those who know the healthy options can be greatly restricted by financial and physical constraints.



“Obviously, the recession is compounding food poverty problems. In many poorer households, money spent on food is the only flexible budget item, so it’s the first thing to be reduced if money gets tight or bills for other expenses – such as rent or electricity – increase. The less disposable income families have, the less likely they are to enjoy a healthy diet.”

The HFfA guide published today contains case studies of community food initiatives already operating successfully throughout Ireland, including the Knocknaheeny Community Café in Cork; Southill Food Co-op in Limerick; the Community Food Garden in Rossinver, Co. Leitrim; the ‘Get Ahead’ Community Breakfast Club and the Dolphin House Homework Club in Rialto, Dublin; ‘Supermarket Tours’ in Galway; and a nutrition education and training programme in Kildare.

The guide was officially launched today by Pat Carey TD, Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, as part of Social Inclusion Week. Speaking at the launch, Minister Carey said: “Social Inclusion Week reminds us that poverty and social exclusion diminish the lives and life chances of those affected. Improving the consumption of healthy food amongst low-income groups through community food initiatives will bring social and health benefits. This will contribute to the objectives of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016, and will help to meet the Government’s targets to eliminate consistent poverty, including food-related deprivation, in Ireland.

“I commend Healthy Food for All on producing this guide, especially its focus on shared learning across the island of Ireland. The guide provides practical, step-by-step information for community groups interested in setting up food projects. I would strongly encourage all groups that work with low-income families and vulnerable groups to see how health food can be incorporated into their activities.”

HFfA’s work on community food initiatives is being supported by celebrity chef Rozanne Stevens, who gave a healthy food cookery demonstration at today’s launch.

“Throughout my years as a professional chef, I have placed particular emphasis on trying to get people to understand that cooking healthy food doesn’t have to be really expensive or really difficult or really boring,” said Ms. Stevens. “It is completely unfair that nutritious food is much more accessible to higher earners than to those on lower incomes. It’s great that Healthy Food for All is encouraging local communities to take things into their own hands with this new guide and, hopefully, it will help communities to address this imbalance.”

‘A Good Practice Guide for Community Food Initiatives’ is available to download from:
www.healthyfoodforall.com/good_practice_guides.htm.

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Notes:

Healthy Food for All (HFfA) is an all-island multi-agency initiative seeking to promote access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. Its over-riding aim is to end food poverty on the island of Ireland. The core work of HFfA is funded by the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, the Health Service Executive and **saferood**, the North-South body responsible for the promotion of food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland. Crosscare currently houses the HFfA initiative. See www.healthyfoodforall.com for further information.

Research into the ‘Affordability of Healthy Eating for Low-Income Groups’ (Food Safety Authority of Ireland, 2009) showed that:

- Welfare adequacy is key to addressing the issue of food poverty. Families dependent on social welfare would have to spend one third of their weekly budget on food in order to obtain a healthy diet as recommended by public health policy.
- Low-income families spend a higher proportion of their income (23-25 per cent) on food, compared to other socio-economic groups (17 per cent).
- It is up to 10 times cheaper to provide calories in the form of unhealthy foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar than in the form of protective foods, such as fruit and vegetables and other important foods like lean meat and fish.