



Healthy Food for All

access | availability | affordability

Submission on Budget 2012

Improving the affordability of food for low-income families

1. Maintain welfare payments and child benefit to ensure affordability of healthy food for welfare recipients.
2. Enhance Child Income Support for Older Children to allow for the higher cost of meeting the nutritional needs of teenage children.
3. Increase the budget for the School Meal Programme to address the unmet demand for support from schools.
4. Ensure healthy eating guidelines for children are implemented in school food initiatives in order to ensure maximum impact of the programme.

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www.healthyfoodforall.com

Introduction

Healthy Food for All is an all-island, multi-agency initiative which seeks to combat food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. Healthy Food for All calls on the government to:

- a) Improve the affordability of healthy food for low-income families
- b) Enhance the provision of healthy food in schools.

Effect of Recession: Rising food costs means people are not eating as well as they should

Supporting low-income families to address their food needs is more urgent than ever before. Food poverty is defined as the lack of an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and access to food. Food poverty is linked to a number of critical public policy issues, notably welfare adequacy, health inequalities, low educational attainment and constraints on participation in social norms and activities. 6.8% of the population in Ireland are in consistent poverty. Almost one-fifth (19.4%) of the population are at risk of poverty. Three of the eight deprivation indicators pertain to food poverty.

In 2009, of the total ROI population:

1. 3.8% were unable to afford a roast once a week
2. 3% were unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day
3. 9.1% were unable to afford to have family or friends around for a meal or drink once a month (CSO 2009)

Approximately 15% of the Irish population are currently experiencing some kind of food deprivation, rising to 35% among low-income groups.

Inferior food consumption is a key factor in higher morbidity and mortality for low-income families. Ireland has some of the highest food costs in the EU. Food prices have risen by 1.4% to August 2011. **Ireland has the highest prices in the EU for fruits, vegetables and potatoes.**¹ The rising cost of food will serve to further compound the ability of low income households to afford a healthy diet. Additional financial resources can lead to an improvement in dietary intake and ultimately better nutritional and health status.

The Cost of a Healthy Dietⁱⁱ:

- Low-income families spend a higher proportion of their income (23-25%) on food compared to other socio-economic groups (17%)
- Families dependent on social welfare would have to spend one third of their weekly budget on food in order to obtain a healthy diet (FSAI 2009)
- Families with older children would need to spend half of their Child Income Support on food
- In order to obtain a healthy diet, families dependent on social welfare would have to spend one third of their weekly budget on food
- Families living on low-income ring-fence money spent on food but it is the often the only flexible item of household expenditure in the budget for low-income households (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1994)
- For a teenager, the cost of healthy eating is €32.90 per week using a multiple supermarket, as compared with €17 for a younger child. This represents more than half of the total child income support for a teenager.
- The largest cost items are fruit and vegetables (33-37% total food cost), followed by lean meat and fish (29-34% total food cost).
- It is twice as expensive to purchase a healthy diet in a local convenience store compared to a multiple supermarket.
- **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 in the form of protective foods such as fruit and vegetables and other important foods such as lean meat and fish.**
- Obesity and food poverty are linked with those in the lower social classes more likely to be overweight or obese according to the latest SLAN figures

Action required in Budget 2012:

Welfare Adequacy

Welfare adequacy is key to addressing the issue of food poverty. Income support policies should ensure that payments are, at a minimum, adequate to meet the recommended dietary needs of adults and children. *Healthy Food for All* recommends that Government consider the range of costs involved in accessing an appropriately healthy diet when reviewing the Social Welfare Allowance:

1. Maintain welfare payments and child benefit to ensure affordability of healthy food for welfare recipients.
2. Enhance Child Income Support for Older Children to allow for the higher cost of meeting the nutritional needs of teenage children.
3. Improve access to cheaper food outlets, particularly in rural areas and deprived urban areas, for example through support for Community Food Initiatives, revision of retail planning guidelines and enhancement of local transport systems.

School Meals Programme

Food poverty has a particularly detrimental impact on children. The Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children Survey found that **16.6% of schoolchildren in Ireland report going to school or bed hungry**, because there is not enough food at homeⁱⁱⁱ. Lack of a nutritionally adequate diet negatively affects a child's health, behaviour and cognitive functioning thus leading to poor school performance, non school attendance and leaving school early and without qualifications.

Intervention at an early stage is crucial as it is better for the child and better for society. Research has shown that the school is an important setting in obtaining a healthy diet. The current School Food Programme is under huge demand and is cost-efficient. While we welcome the increases in funding to the School Meals Programme over the past number of years a large number of schools and projects are excluded from this funding. Levels of funding for schools are being maintained regardless of increases in the number of pupils. Best practice in School Food Initiatives, such as Breakfast Clubs, should be supported as they have specific benefits in terms of meeting nutritional needs, improving school attendance, improving concentration in class and provide an opportunity for positive engagement before school begins. There is a need to improve nutritional standards within the School Meals Programme to ensure maximum impact on educational attainment. *Healthy Food for All* calls on the government to expand the School Food Programme to ensure that children have access to a healthy diet, as proposed in the review of the school meals scheme by the Department of Social Protection.

4. Increase the budget for the School Meals Schemes to address the unmet demand for support from schools.
5. Ensure healthy eating guidelines for children are implemented in school food initiatives in order to ensure maximum impact of the programme.
6. Promote best-practice through in-school actions.
7. Expand school breakfast as they have specific benefits in terms of attracting children to school and facilitate positive engagement before school begins.
8. Provide additional resources for school food initiatives which target low-income children, to meet the non-food costs associated with providing free school meals.

ⁱ [Eurostat 2010](#)

ⁱⁱ [FSAI \(2009\) The affordability of healthy eating for low-income households](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children](#)

Appendix 1: HFfA Policy Briefing (2009) The affordability of Healthy Eating for Low-Income Households

Updated cost of a healthy diet and as percentage of weekly welfare income post Budget 2010*

Household composition and calorie needs	Multiple supermarket	Discount store	Local convenience store
Family 1: man, woman and two children; 8,200 calories per day	€ 132.40 (29.1%)	€ 114.80 (25.2%)	€255.4 (56.2%)
Family 2: man, woman without children; 4,400 calories per day	€82.2 (25.2%)	€65.8 (20.2%)	€154.7 (47.4%)
Family 3: single woman with one child; 3,400 calories per day	€54.8 (14.1%)	€45.4 (11.7%)	€109 (23.4%)
Family 4: elderly woman; 1,800 calories per day	€32.4 (21.1%)	€27 (17.5%)	€54 (41.9%)
Five-year-old boy; 1,400 calories per day	€17 (26.5%)	€16.40 (25.6%)	€37.1 (57.7%)
Fourteen-year-old boy; 2,400 calories per day	€32.9 (52.2%)	€33.5 (52.1%)	€64.5 (100.3%)

* Original figures adjusted by -6.4% in line with food price trends from April 2009 to January 2010 (Source: CSO)