

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

Committee Room 1

Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Morton (Chairman)
Mr. Gary Ramey (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Sid Prest
Mr. Gary Burrill
Mr. Brian Skabar
Hon. Karen Casey
Mr. Geoff MacLellan
Mr. Alfie MacLeod
Mr. Keith Bain

[Mr. Geoff MacLellan was replaced by Mr. Leo Glavine.]
[Mr. Alfie MacLeod was replaced by Hon. Chris d'Entremont.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project

Dr. Patricia Williams, PhD, PDt,
Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Policy Change;
Director of Participatory Action Research and Training Centre
on Food Security, Mount Saint Vincent University

Ms. Karen Leblanc, Program Coordinator -
Maggie's Place Resource Centre, Amherst

Ms Cynthia Watt, Project Coordinator -
Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project

Ms. Debbie Smith, Executive Director -
South Shore Family Support Centre

Ms. Lynn Langille, Health Disparities Coordinator -
Healthy Communities, NS Dept. of Health and Wellness

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 7, 2011

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hello everybody. I think we should call the meeting to order. I think everybody who is planning to be here is here. My name is Jim Morton, I'm the chairman of the committee. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services and I would like to welcome all those people who are in the room.

We have some with us from Mount Saint Vincent University who will be introducing themselves in a moment. Welcome to all people who are observing, for different reasons, today.

The first thing we will do is have the committee members introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The focus of our discussion today will be the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project and Dr. Patty Williams from Mount Saint Vincent University is here to lead that. So Patty, if you would be willing to introduce yourself and your team, I'd appreciate it.

DR. PATRICIA WILLIAMS: Sure, thank you, Mr. Chairman. We welcome this opportunity to talk about how Nova Scotia is in a unique position to take a leadership role on the issue of food security. It's an opportunity, really, to make life more affordable and sustainable for Nova Scotians.

I'm here with several people, who I'll introduce in a second, but I want to highlight right from the beginning that we are working with a strong network of partners, over 80 individuals and 30 organizations that we work with on this project. More importantly, our research tells us that really when people have the opportunity to be engaged in this way on an issue like this, they can do some extraordinary work together and we're going to share some of the highlights of that work with you. It enables people to make better choices in their daily lives but also to work together to make lasting change, in terms of impacting the lives of all Nova Scotians.

I'll be presenting today with Karen LeBlanc, who is here to my right. She's a member of our research team and I'll introduce Karen more in a minute. Also I want to introduce Cynthia Watt, who is our food costing project coordinator and who keeps us organized. Debbie Smith, who is behind me, is the executive director of the South Shore Family Resource Association and also Lynn Langille is coordinator of Health Disparities, with Health and Wellness. All of these ladies have been involved with our food costing project since the beginning and that's over 10 years of working together on this.

We also have, as you can hear, Lisa has Rory with her here so Lisa is a mom who works with Karen at Maggie's Place. We also have four dietetic intern students from Mount Saint Vincent who are here with us as well.

In the next 15 minutes, we want to set the stage for our work on food security and food costing by first putting it in the perspective of the current context. We want to be able to share some of the highlights around what we know about the determinants of food security and what we've learned over the past 10 years of doing this work. Also, some exciting ways that we are in a position really to create a ripple effect from this work and from the foundation that has been laid here in this province.

I'm sure I don't need to tell any of you that food is a hot issue; we're hearing it in the news every day. Food and food security are both current and compelling issues globally, nationally and locally. Soaring food prices, child obesity rates, concerns with food waste and food safety, together with Buy Local campaigns and really public sector interest in creating more healthy farming communities, all suggest that food will be sort of the defining issue of the next decade.

We've seen, as you can see in this slide, that the People's Food Policy Project - a national project where citizens have been engaged in discussions about food policy and issues of food security - are really calling on, in this case, the federal government to really take some action on this issue. It has really been spawned by this growing crisis that we're seeing here in Nova Scotia and across the country and especially with the escalating food prices that we've seen in the news lately.

So I'm going to turn things over to Karen for a minute. Karen, as I mentioned, works as a co-ordinator at Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre in Amherst and she sees everyday how this global crisis is playing out in the lives of families.

MS. KAREN LEBLANC: Hi, I'm Karen and I'm a parent education co-ordinator - I do all kinds of things at Maggie's Place. Recently, just last month, our local food bank saw 15 new families, families that they had not seen before in the month of May. We've seen increases in food bank usage. Usually at this time of year, the food bank usually just kind of drops off because, you know, it's warmer out and people don't have to have so much oil and things like that. That's not the case now, it has gone up. Just in calls at Maggie's Place we've seen increased requests for assistance with light bills, oil, diapers, groceries, medication and food. We used to get a few a month, now we get three to four calls a week.

Food insecurity means that people cannot access enough healthy safe food that they like and enjoy in a manner that's socially acceptable or worried that they will not be able to do so. Having to pay power bills so they will go without groceries this week - that's food insecurity. Being able to afford to put good healthy food in your child's lunch bag so you don't get a phone call from the school or the teacher or a note or a call from Family and Children's Services - that's food security. One of the quotes that I like that we did at a story-sharing workshop back in 2003, somebody said hunger is the actual physical pain but when I think of food security, I think more of feeling self-assured and feeling safe and feeling that, okay, I'm going to have enough money this month to feed my kids.

DR. WILLIAMS: So this next slide we have provided in your packages, that you should have and it shows that there are multiple determinants of food security. Those determinants can be sort of categorized into two categories - those resources and the capacity to access and use food that you see in the red there, and indicators of a local and sustainable food supply in the blue. So clearly if you look at this multitude of indicators and determinants of food security, you can see that it's an issue that is relevant to everyone - all citizens, all sectors, and all government departments.

So building on the definition that Karen just shared, food security means that all people at all times have access to sufficient nutritious safe food. It also means that we want to be able to have a vibrant, local, sustainable food system and that means being able to produce, procure and distribute our food in ways that are environmentally sound and socially just and sustainable.

If this is being done in ways that has negative impacts on the environment or threatens the ability of future generations to grow, hunt and fish foods, then there's reason for us to be concerned. We can probably all think of examples if we look at what's listed here of policies that undermine food security, especially for more vulnerable populations as Karen has described, either through policies that exist or lack of policy in a particular area.

Karen has already talked about the financial resources and we know this is the most significant determinant of food security. We know it's a particularly significant issue in Nova Scotia as Karen will point out. We also know from our research that transportation to food retail outlets is a key determinant. We hear over and over again how policies impact people's ability to get to food and how food gets to people as well. We hear stories about families who don't have access to a car or public transportation and how in the end this impacts by cutting into their food budgets; they end up spending money for a taxi or they go to a higher priced convenience store to access their food. That really has an impact on their food budget.

MS. LEBLANC: For example, we did food costing in Cumberland County - Pugwash, being about a 45-minute drive away from Amherst, and Parrsboro being a 45-minute drive away from Amherst. I saw turnip in Amherst that was \$0.33 a pound, the same turnip in Pugwash was \$0.99 a pound, as it was in Parrsboro. The people in Parrsboro quite often say that the food they have access to, in the one grocery store in their community, is often less than desirable because that's what they have. There are quite a few things, like baby formula, they have to order it in. So the drive, like I said, is about 45 minutes and there's no public transportation.

DR. WILLIAMS: Also related to the food supply determinants of food security, we know in the province that only about 12.8 per cent of the food that we buy is grown and produced here in our province. The average distance that food travels before it reaches Nova Scotians is about 4,000 kilometres which has impacts. Producer viability is another issue that's of significant concern in Nova Scotia and I'm sure that some of you know that the number of census farmers in 1951 was quite a bit more than now. The numbers are over 23,000 in 1951, and 2,600 today at this time.

What we want to point out here is that this multitude of determinants tells us we really must work for structural change and socio-economic and environmental factors and really be able to pool ideas and resources across many different government departments, many different sectors to really be able to have an impact on this issue. Old ways won't work so we need to think of new ways of working.

MS. LEBLANC: Many of the families that I deal with have very basic cooking skills and food prep skills. They come from families where both parents had to work and therefore the meals were something that came from a can so they don't know how to cook a chicken or they don't know if you take this roast and cook it, it will last for x number of days. They didn't get home economics in school.

This is from the Canadian Community Health Survey: Nova Scotia has consistently had higher rates of food insecurity than the national average and our research supports this finding. Nearly 85,000 households in Nova Scotia experience food insecurity in 2007-08 and over 22,000 citizens accessed a food bank in 2010, up 34 per cent since 2008.

It's no great surprise that the lowest income bracket has the highest rate of food insecurity. In Nova Scotia, we know that about 158,000 people were estimated to be living in low income. That's the equivalent to three times the population of Colchester County. Of the individuals relying on income assistance, nearly 64 per cent experience food insecurity. As well, 57 per cent of food insecure households were reliant on salaries and wage.

DR. WILLIAMS: The consequences of this, to nutritional, physical, mental and social well-being are far-reaching and long-lasting. It not only affects individuals who experience food insecurity but as we can all appreciate, affect each and every one of us through escalating health care and social costs which we know takes a substantial and growing proportion of government budgets and impacts our economic sustainability and ultimately our ability to be a vibrant and productive Nova Scotia.

As we know as well, Nova Scotia has some of Canada's highest rates of obesity, diabetes, cancer and heart disease. These are all diseases for which poor nutrition is a known contributing factor. Individuals in food insecure households are more likely to report poor or fair self-rated health, mental health problems, multiple chronic conditions, as well as children's health problems. We know the costs are great. A 2002 study by GPI Atlantic found that the cost of chronic illness in Nova Scotia was \$1.24 billion in direct medical costs and \$1.79 billion in lost productivity each year.

Just related to the obesity bullet there - until recently, many people believed that the primary cause of obesity was lack of personal responsibility, either individually or parentally. These people were thought to be lacking willpower and proper information but there's been a lot of research to show that this is not the case. Because refined grains and sugar and fat cost less per calorie than fruits and vegetables, people lacking resources may be purchasing the less expensive, energy-dense foods, in order to stave off hunger. Or they may be avoiding fruits and vegetables because of their increased cost per calorie. This has been well documented.

When parents worry about where their next meal will come from, these stresses and inconsistency in their diet affect not only their mental health but their social well-being. It also can affect the mental health and social well-being of their children. Even children who are not hungry are impacted negatively by living in a food insecure household. Parents may be reducing their family's quality of food, feeding their children unbalanced diets or skipping meals so that children can eat. I've been involved in several research projects with Lynn McIntyre and this is a finding that is consistent - that parents, especially mothers, tend to skip meals to feed their children.

MS. LEBLANC: I have a mom at my centre who sends her child off to school and then she goes to Tim Hortons sometimes, which is her support system, and she gets herself a large double-double and that's her food for the day. She just nurses it all day because she wants to save the food for the children.

There's another little girl who went to school and didn't have her lunch and the kids said, where's your lunch and she said, I forgot it and this happened three or four days. There's no food at home for the child to bring lunch. Families want to be able to feed their children healthy, that's something we all strive for and we know that's what we're supposed to do. But when you have three children and you're on a very limited budget and an apple, one beautiful apple, is 79 cents but this big bag of Cheezies is also 79 cents and you have three children and you need recess for three children, that one apple is not going to divide up three ways very well. So people are going for the cheap but dense stuff.

It's the same thing as milk. The milk costs \$3.20 for two litres but you can get pop on sale for 69 cents. If you have a bunch of children and you want them to drink, even though you know that milk is more nutritious, you've got to make it go further so you're going to go for the pop.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, these are the tough choices and when we look at the results of our food costing study, it really shows why parents and individuals are forced to make these tough choices. We've been doing food costing since 2002 and we've now completed five rounds of food costing, the most recent in 2010, and there is a handout in your packages that shows a few slides on our food costing project.

We've conducted food costing in all areas of the province, in all districts. The research was initially funded in 2002, by Health Canada and then more recently, since 2004, by the Department of Health and Wellness. Traditionally it has been conducted by health professionals but Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada, and anywhere that we know of, that uses participatory approaches to do food costing.

Participatory approach means that those affected by the issue of food and security are engaged in all aspects of the research: in decision-making about the research, in collecting data, analyzing the data and using the research results to try to influence policy. It has enabled leaders in health systems, academia, community groups and community-based programs to work with those affected by health inequities to influence policy.

A key partner here is family resource centres, as you can see, in terms of who is with us today. Family resource centres that are funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada's Community Action Program for Children and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program. These programs work with some of the most vulnerable families in the province, and are key partners in enabling us to be able to do this work together.

MS. LEBLANC: So the goal of the Food Costing Project is for all Nova Scotians to be food secure and our purpose was to help build capacity food security for all Nova Scotians using participatory approaches to examine and address the accessibility of a nutritious diet. I've been involved in the Food Costing Project for the past 10 years. I've seen this project empower and engage people – those who are affected by food insecurity. I

myself was a mom on assistance years ago and I used to think there was something wrong with me, that I wasn't a good parent because I couldn't - the end of the month was here and there wasn't food. I used to think that was me, it was something I was doing wrong.

I came to find out it wasn't me at all. Once I became involved in the project and realized that, you know, it cost x number of dollars to feed a family the basic diet, and I didn't have that much money coming in per month. That really empowered me and it kind of lifted me up out of the mental depression I had been in. It allows people to better understand the issues. It's a common problem, not an individual one, and it has given many opportunities and skill-building opportunities to make the change, for people to make better in their lives and their communities.

DR. WILLIAMS: The next slide, there are two handouts in your package where these are blown up because the numbers are very small here, but what this shows is that we've created scenarios to look at what is the impact if a family were to purchase a basic nutritious diet in Nova Scotia. We've taken into account all of the potential income that a family would have and this particular family is a family of four on Income Assistance in Nova Scotia in June 2010.

You can see that when you take into account all of the potential sources of income like personal allowance, the shelter allowance, the child care allowance and then the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the GST tax credit and the child allowance and a special needs allowance - all potential sources of income - and then sort of match that up against the monthly expenses for basic needs that the family would have, things like shelter, or transportation, clothing and footwear, household cleaning supplies, personal care expenses and child care. You can see that the bottom line, once that family purchases a basic nutritious diet, which would cost this particular family \$770.65 - at the end of the day, if they were to purchase that basic nutritious diet, they would be in the hole by \$440.25.

So we've used very conservative estimates here and there are lots of things that are not included in these scenarios. It doesn't include things like food purchased outside the home, nutritional supplements, routine household operating expenses such as appliances and maintenance and it doesn't include out-of-pocket health care expenses such as co-payment amounts on prescriptions or over-the-counter medications, dental care. So very conservative in terms of what, and it's clear that if you were in this situation, you clearly would not be able to make ends meet if you were to purchase that basic nutritious diet. As Karen has said, it's the nutrition, it's the diet that is going to get cut.

We've also looked at several other scenarios in the report that you all have but this is just another one that we wanted to highlight. This is a female-led lone parent household earning minimum wage with three children and you can see that similarly she's facing a significant deficit and would simply just not be able to purchase a nutritious diet.

MS. LEBLANC: So what have we learned - all kinds of good things. Many Nova Scotians cannot afford to eat a healthy diet. I see them every day, they come into my centre. Food insecurity contributes to social exclusion. You don't talk to people about if you have food in your house or not. It's always kept private. It causes shame and you're not likely to go out and participate in community events. Food insecurity increases household stress. People have to make tough choices - do I pay the rent this month, do I pay the oil this month or do I put groceries in my house?

Food security includes sustainable food systems and transportation. Improving food security is a key part in making life more affordable. The food budget is the one that's most expendable. That's the one that gets cut if you want your kids to play in soccer and it costs \$70 - you take it out of your food budget if you want your child to do things.

DR. WILLIAMS: So from this work that we've been involved in over the last 10 years, we really have a better understanding of the causes of food insecurity but also the strategies for addressing food security or building food security. What we've learned is, because of that multitude of factors that come into play in terms of food security, it's really important that we start to work vertically and horizontally within government, and involving different sectors and people across society to be able to really, truly address this issue.

One of the key things that we've learned is that community supports are really necessary to engage citizens on this issue and we've shown that by being able to engage people on this issue, people are able to work together and come up with solutions that none of us would be able to come up with on our own. So we've learned that community supports such as investing - you know, supporting people's child care, transportation, working with family resource centres to enable them to support participation of people affected by this issue - really, really pays off in terms of engaging people. There is lots happening within communities in Nova Scotia as a result of the work that our project has done, but also as a result of the work that's happening with family resource centres and the supports they provide to families.

Working together on all stages of the research helps us to build capacity to effect policy change and ultimately contributes to building food security in Nova Scotia. We're really seeing that there is a food-security movement in Nova Scotia and we really do have an opportunity at this point in time to build on that momentum. Many positive steps have been taken by the work that we've been involved in, as well as work that others are doing, and within government as well.

One of the most important things about the project that has happened is that it has given voice to people experiencing food insecurity. It has provided a means for women to be part of something bigger and to have their voices heard. Women are able to share their stories and use these stories to create an awareness and understanding of the issue and its solutions, and to work with others to influence policy change.

As you all know, food security is one of four priority areas of the Healthy Eating Nova Scotia strategy and so there's an opportunity there to work within that strategy. We've used our findings to inform increases to minimum wage and income assistance rates, but as you can see from our findings from June 2010, there's more work that needs to be done there.

As well, I think one of the most exciting things we've seen result from this work is the strong network of committed partners. As I said earlier, over 80 committed individuals across the province and 30 organizations, not only in Nova Scotia but throughout Canada, are involved in our food-costing work. One of the core partners is the Nova Scotia Food Security Network which formed as a result of this work in 2005.

The Food Security Network is one of the core partners, the lead community partner on a new project that we're all involved in, Activating Change Together for Community Food Security. This is a five-year project that's funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and it's an opportunity to really understand the potential of local food systems and their impact on food access, so building on our food-security work, and to use this understanding to inform policy change to build community food security. There is also a handout on food costing but also one on this Activating Change Together for Community Food Security in your packages.

We just want to end with some key messages and a bit of a road map that, because of the small font on this, we've also included a copy of this in your package.

As a group of individuals, we have a vision for food security that it's really the cornerstone to healthy communities. As I said earlier, food impacts us all and we know that by really addressing an issue like food security you can build capacity, not only at an individual level but at a community level, and really create a healthier community by enabling people to have a basic, nutritious diet. We know from the research that this can have an impact on health care costs, childhood obesity rates, chronic disease prevention, and mental health in all age groups.

This lays out some key things that we see as being necessary to truly address food security in this province. First of all, continuing to monitor income security in the province, but not only to monitor it and to ensure that we can move towards income adequacy, we need to do more than that. We need to do it in a way that it continues to engage people in the issue, but we need to go beyond that. What we need to do is support the great work that is already happening in communities throughout Nova Scotia.

The model that we have, in terms of a university-government-community partnership to do this work, is one model for doing that. We also need other mechanisms to work across government departments, to work in a coordinated and collaborative way to address the issue, and we need to continue to build community capacity and strengthen

community engagement and leadership for support for initiatives that communities themselves define.

Things that this might include would be hands-on education and practical food experience, through things like community- or school-based gardens and collective kitchen programs. Programs that can really engage people in the issue, so that they can work with others and learn more about it and try to have an impact.

The other key piece of this is that we need to really examine provincial and local policy further. There's been lots of great work done already, but we need to look at every existing and new policy that we have for its impact on food security and really establish an accountability framework for examining the impact of policies that impact community food security.

Finally, a significant goal to ensure community food security is ensuring income adequacy is really part of a comprehensive strategy for healthy communities in Nova Scotia. Unless Nova Scotians can realize income adequacy and not end up in the situation of these two scenarios that we've presented here, we're really not going to make any progress toward achieving a healthy Nova Scotia.

MS. LEBLANC: So, the take-home message: if you get nothing else from this, what we want you to remember is that many Nova Scotians can't afford to eat a healthy diet. Healthier families result in lower costs of health care, lower crime rates, and decreases in mental health problems, and the children will become healthy, well-educated, productive adults.

DR. WILLIAMS: So everyone has a part to play in Nova Scotia becoming a leader in achieving food security. It isn't just government; it's citizens as well. Government has a key role to play in enabling citizens to be able to take part in that. So we're really happy to take questions and are interested in any comments or questions that you have. As well, Lynn, Debbie, and Cynthia will join us in the question and discussion period.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Patty and Karen, for that presentation - a comprehensive presentation, I might say. I've begun to keep a speakers' list, and Ms. Casey is the first member on it. Then I think it's Mr. Burrill, and I see some other hands.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Thank you to the presenters for outlining for us a circumstance that is real in our province and some of the work that has been done to try to address it and provide support for those who find themselves in those circumstances.

I want to go back to the turnip example; that intrigued me a bit. I guess I'm trying to determine in my own mind why the cost of the turnip is different in Amherst than it is in Parrsboro and I'm coming up with a number of possibilities like transportation costs, availability of local product, retailer mark-up; maybe others. I guess my question to you is,

during your research and during your studies, have you been able to determine that? I think if we can't determine that, we can't address it. Have you been able to determine why there would be such a significant difference? Amherst and Parrsboro are just two examples, and a turnip is just one example.

DR. WILLIAMS: What we know from our research is that consistently, year after year, we found that it does cost more in rural areas, compared with urban areas, to purchase this basic nutritious diet - so not looking at individual foods, but at the basic nutritious diet.

Part of the study that we haven't mentioned is that when we go into grocery stores to cost this basic nutritious diet, we look at whether or not the lowest-priced item that we cost is produced locally or not. We found that when local foods are available in grocery stores, they tend to cost a lower price, which is good news for people if you want to support not only a healthy diet but a sustainable diet.

So in terms of getting at why a turnip costs more in Parrsboro versus Amherst (Interruption) Pugwash, sorry, those specific reasons, no, we haven't looked at that. I think that the key point here is it does cost more if you're having to pay for a taxi or if you're also relying on, you know, maybe you're relying on somebody else to get you to the grocery store where you're going to be able to get more for your food dollar rather than having to rely on that convenience store.

So what's really important from that is that having the supports available in local communities, either transportation supports like family resource centres provide so that people can get to the grocery store and not have to rely on the convenience store, or that in our communities we have ways that people can access food, better ways that people can access food so we aren't just reliant on one way to get food, is what we're learning from other research across the country as well.

MS. CASEY: If I could just follow up on that, I understand the transportation for the individual to get to the store but my question is the cost of the items varies significantly and if it is, in fact, that transportation costs for that produce to get to the store is what's causing a retailer to have to mark that up by that percentage?

MS. LEBLANC: I think that's exactly why that is. Because both towns - like in Amherst, it's there and there's a big store but both towns are another 45 minute drive away from, you know, like the main drop-off area. So transportation, of course, would cost a little more.

MS. CASEY: So would subsidies to help with the transportation allow the retailer to be more competitive with that price?

MS. LEBLANC: I think so.

MS. CASEY: Thank you.

MS. LEBLANC: Do you want to know about the local beef?

MS. CASEY: It's everything, I know that.

MS. LEBLANC: At one of the stores I asked them, I said, because we've been doing this - we want to know about local. So I went into a large store in Amherst and asked, is this beef local? He said if we can ship it here in 24 hours, it's considered local. So that beef could have been grazing in a field in Alberta like 24 hours ago. Sorry, Patty, I didn't mean to interrupt.

DR. WILLIAMS: No, I mean since it's complex, there's not one factor. So transportation costs would be one factor but then market share is another factor that comes into play in terms of how much retailers have to charge for food.

MS. LEBLANC: Both of those towns only have one major grocery store.

MS. CASEY: The goal here is to get the price down so that it can be competitive.

DR. WILLIAMS: Well, I think, you know, I guess by getting the price down for the consumer is one end of it but there's also what the farmers get for that turnip, being the other issue. So it's maybe not as easy as an answer of providing a subsidy for transportation but to look at how supports can be available in communities so that people have better access to food through other means besides just a convenience store or the local large grocery store? There are maybe innovative projects like food box projects that would be affordable for people to be able to access, to have some better access to fruits and vegetables for example.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I think we'll go to Mr. Burrill at this point and then to Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. GARY BURRILL: I just want to say first, looking at this after it was released a month or so ago, the food costing study, that I think it's one of the most important documents in social policy to have been published in the last couple of years in the province. I mean, it brings a level of empirical precision to a lot of questions that are often dealt with in a loose or a vague way. So it has really improved, it has really raised up the whole discourse about income and equity and income inadequacy. I want to say that first.

I just want to make sure at a basic level that we understand what fundamentally is being said here. Am I understanding it right, that are you saying that by means of the food costing surveys and the precise information that is gathered there about what is required to have the nutritious food basket in the household, that by means of that, in light of what we already know also about other household expenses, that it is now actually possible for us to

know in Nova Scotia what would be required in dollars and cents for a range of different household configurations to have food adequacy in the home? Is that a fair summary of it?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, with our estimates, in terms of looking at basic essential needs and what that basic nutritious diet would cost, yes, we're able to come up with what it would take for a family to be able to afford a basic nutritious diet and meet their other basic needs.

MR. BURRILL: Would it be useful to have you explain a little bit about the methodology of what the nutritious food basket is? I know you have it in your documents but I know it is not familiar to everyone.

DR. WILLIAMS: Sure, yes, it's called The National Nutritious Food Basket and it's a standard tool that is developed by Health Canada back in 1998 and then was revised and updated to reflect the current consumption patterns of Canadians but also the current nutrition recommendations because there had been a lot of changes in the last 10 years. So we have a very good tool to reflect a basic nutritious diet for 23 different age and gender categories, including pregnancy. It's your basic foods - you're assuming that all meals and snacks are made from scratch and basically, if you think of Canada's Food Guide, the four food groups and that's the foods that would make up this basic nutritious food basket. It's 67 food items in the four food groups.

MS. LEBLANC: It's also the bare minimum, it's very bare.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, it's assuming also that you're going to one grocery store to do your grocery shopping. You're not going to a farmers' market, you're not buying special organic foods or special food items. Again, everything is made from scratch, no convenience foods or junk food - things that you would normally buy when you are in a grocery store. It doesn't take that into consideration but we have added very conservative estimates for household cleaning supplies and personal care expenses in our scenarios, knowing that they are also essential for people.

MR. BURRILL: Further, I just wanted to get it clear about the methodology. In the calculation by which you've come to the monthly food deficit for various household figures, you were saying that you have to calculate the expenses and then calculate the revenues and then see the difference - you are quite stingy with the expenses, that you are measuring just the bare. It seems to me also that your calculations are very generous on the revenue side. For example, with Income Assistance recipients, we know that one doesn't automatically become a recipient of special needs allowance by being on IA - some people receive that, some people don't, but you have that in your whole calculation. So it seems to me that the effect of this ought to be that your figures are always understating the case. Is that so?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, I do believe that is the case. I mean, like you say, there is the special needs allowance as well as the transportation allowance. We do hear over and over again from our partners that people aren't sort of able to access that or don't know it's available or for whatever reason they may not be getting that.

MS. LEBLANC: People certainly don't receive GST every month. It comes every three months and it is usually spent on something extra but they've divided it up so it's clearly calculated in there. Yes, I've also told them they're being too generous.

DR. WILLIAMS: And we've had this discussion back and forth lots over the years with our family resource centre partners because they work directly with the families, they see the reality. We're trying to look at this and say what would be very conservative and, if anything, I do think that we are kind of overestimating the situation, the deficit that many families are facing.

MR. BURRILL: Underestimating.

DR. WILLIAMS: Underestimating, sorry, yes.

MS. LEBLANC: In that way nobody can come and say oh well, you didn't count this and you didn't count that because they certainly did. They have everything figured in there that you could possibly - if you were a family on assistance, you could possibly access in the right circumstance.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That takes us to Mr. d'Entremont, followed by Mr. Glavine.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you for coming today and presenting this to us. There are a lot of moving parts in this one, and I think to be able to whittle it down to a few pages took a lot of work. What I do see as a little bit missing here is that network of committed partners. You have it in the presentation, but I didn't really find it anywhere in here. When it comes to the food industry, where are the Sobeys and the Quik-Ways? Where do they factor into food security or insecurity of providing a basket that is affordable?

I notice, to go into a Superstore and looking at lettuce, apples, and all those things - you see a lot of people breezing by them because they're completely out of reach. Where is the food industry in this discussion? I see a lot of government here and I see a lot of trying to find more dollars to stretch, but where is that other partner?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, you're right. They have been involved in the sense that we wouldn't be able to do this project without the retail, so they partner in that way. I think we have more work to do, absolutely, in terms of engaging that sector, in terms of the issue.

I recently presented to the board of the Canadian Foundation for Dietetic Research, and industry is a key partner there - Loblaws sit on that board - and there was a huge interest in this issue. It's not only about how to get healthy food to people, impacting the health care budget, but also our carbon footprint. How do we make our diets more sustainable so it impacts the ability for future generations to be able to feed themselves?

It was an issue that you could see really hit home with that group, the private sector and the food industry. The retail sector, specifically, is a group that we've talked about in terms of this new project that we have, in terms of engaging them in some of the policy discussions that we're planning to have over the next several years. We're going to be assessing local food systems in four communities in Nova Scotia and there will be an opportunity to come together in terms of some policy forms and to engage the food industry and the retail sector in terms of the role that they can play in this. We don't necessarily have the answer as to what role they can play.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: No, because a number of years that I did get to be Minister of Agriculture I was having that discussion, just trying to get local foods into our Superstores and/or Sobeys. You always ran up against, well, sometimes it's cheaper to ship it in from Alberta than it is to try to get it off a farm here in Nova Scotia.

If I look at my area, which is a mostly rural area, it sort of goes to what Karen was saying about the availability of a turnip. The Quik-Way guy who has that little store is probably driving into Sobeys or Superstore and picking up a full basket of things and then trucking it back to his little store to sell to that local area. But I'm saying a person next door of modest means can't get into Yarmouth, for example, and is going to have to buy the \$0.99 or something of its equivalent that's on the shelf right now. It's not just the turnip, it's the eggs, even though they're supposed to be a managed commodity, and the same thing with milk - they're on the higher end of that set price, et cetera.

I'd like to see some more on transportation issues in it too, because to get from a rural area - many in our rural areas have no way to get into our more urban centres that have the bigger stores.

DR. WILLIAMS: You're right. It is such a complex issue, and that's where it's so important in terms of finding a way within government to work horizontally and vertically to address some of these issues. There's not going to be one answer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Glavine and then Mr. Ramey.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: I would be remiss, Patty, in not pointing out the work that you and Mount Saint Vincent have done on this project for now almost 10 years and many other people who have become part of it around the province, to contribute to the greater understanding of the cost of food supply, food security, healthy diet, that whole area. I do want to commend you for that work.

I believe very strongly that - getting back to a better diet in Nova Scotia - a more nutritious diet, is, as you've pointed out, rightly linked to moving and returning to greater control over growing and producing our own food. I think that's an absolutely essential piece because we once were in the reverse, where we actually produced 90 per cent of our food and imported only 10 per cent; now we're roughly the reverse of that. Until we gain control over producing our food, I think we're in for greater deficiencies in our diet because we will see, I believe, a tidal wave of food pricing increases and, of course, where we import so much, we are so vulnerable to those increases.

First of all, I want to, in talking about your work, you first reported in 2002, so you've been making recommendations. I always get very upset over some great public policies that come forward - as Mr. Burrill rightly pointed out, this is a great document. Since 2002, what has happened to your recommendations, in your view? Where are some of the, I guess, highlights and a few of the disappointments in what you have been telling government to start to work toward?

DR. WILLIAMS: Well I think our recommendations have changed over the years, obviously, in terms of the change in context, so we've learned a lot. I think the recommendations we have today are quite different because of what we've learned.

From the beginning, we've been saying our key finding is that many Nova Scotians simply cannot afford a nutritious diet and that's sort of the bottom line, in terms of what our work shows. We have worked closely with the Department of Community Services and formerly the Department of Health and former Department of Health Promotion and Protection to really be able to work with government in using these findings. We've been able to have an impact in terms of increases to Income Assistance.

When we look at we're in the midst of submitting a paper for publication where we'll be looking at Income Assistance rates over the course of the 10 years and we're seeing that families are struggling more and more. Even though there have been increases to both the minimum wage and Income Assistance, families in the end are worse off because of the increasing cost of living and the wages and assistance rates have not kept up.

We've had success there but at the end of the day, are families better off? Do families have more food on the table? Are they able to access a healthy diet more easily? I would say maybe not. I think there are good things happening as a result of some of this work and other things that have been happening, initiatives happening at a community level that enable families to have better access to nutritious food. For example, the Kids Action Program in the Annapolis Valley has a food box program that is geared to pregnant and nursing women. We've done some research with that project and we've found that is really valuable for those families who are able to have access to that but not all families have access to it, it is limited. I think they have only a certain amount of funding to run the program so it's kind of a subsidized food box but it has a very powerful impact on those families that have that.

There are those types of things, community-supported agriculture initiatives where communities are engaged in buying a share, supporting their local farmer and then enabling them to have better access to food. I think these types of things have been positive. I wouldn't say they are a result of our work but they are a result of this growing food movement in Nova Scotia and definitely we've contributed to sort of that movement, I think.

MR. GLAVINE: I personally think the alarm bells are starting to go off. I just think of last week when I had a call from the Upper Room Food Bank in Kingston which does have a very significant clientele of families. This is in an area just in a shadow of 14-Wing Greenwood where you have a lot of very good salaries, very good employment.

The manager of the food bank called and he wanted to know what the poverty line is. He wanted to know what kind of level of family should he really be serving because he's finding more and more demands and use of the food bank for those who are actually a bit above the poverty line and just for the very things that you've pointed out. The general cost of living in Nova Scotia is truly skyrocketing, whether it's our electricity costs, whether it's our gasoline to put in a car, and certainly when you now go to Sobeys and Foodland, or any of the food markets, food is very, very costly.

I gave him the figures of LICO and I'm just wondering if you used those as kind of a cut-off mark in terms of those who can no longer afford a substantive food basket each week in their home? I'm just wondering what figures do you use to kind of determine at least the capability of buying a nutritious food basket?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, so there's the low income cut-off; it's sort of one way. That tends to, I guess, underestimate probably the actual numbers of people living in poverty, I think. What we're using here, it's more of a market access measure approach, somewhere in between, and then there's the low income measure which is probably - you know, you would sort of get the higher numbers of people living in poverty if you use that approach.

So I think what we tend to use here is sort of middle ground. Really, if you think about the growing issue that families are facing - even working families are really struggling. More and more people are only able to get part-time or contract work with maybe no benefits or little in the way of benefits. So people are falling into poverty and sometimes it can be a vicious cycle as Karen can speak to.

MS. LEBLANC: I have three children and on paper my income looks great, right. You wouldn't think there would ever be any food issues or anything like that. I have three teenagers, one of them being disabled - he's got cerebral palsy so I have diapers for him. He doesn't require a special diet but he likes lots of it. At any given week, like this week, I have two cars sitting in my yard, neither one of them is working; Duran needed medication last week. I work for a non-profit, I love it, but I have no benefits. So the grocery bill gets

hit, right, because I can take the money out of the grocery bill this week and we'll eat rice, you know, extra rice or something.

That's what happens and it could be anyone of you - anyone of you. Tomorrow, if somebody gets cancer, or gets sick, or has some sort of chronic disease, it doesn't matter who it is, that just levels it right out. Everybody, anybody can be affected by it.

DR. WILLIAMS: Just back to your question about what is an appropriate poverty line and what should we be using - I mean I think that there is research, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, two epidemiologists in the U.K., have shown that in countries where they've been able to sort of decrease the gap between the rich and the poor, that they've been able to show positive outcomes as it relates to crime and health outcomes, rates of obesity - many different indicators across a whole spectrum. People are happier in those societies where there is less of a gap between the rich and the poor and so we really need to think about as a society, as Nova Scotians - what do we want? The research does show that by having more and more economic growth - is it necessarily the answer here? We really need to think about programs that are going to decrease that gap.

So in terms of where the poverty line should be, I think we need to sort of work at enabling those living in deeper and deeper poverty to be able to be more equal, in our society, to the rich. Not to say that everybody should be rich but that we need to decrease that gap between the rich and the poor - absolutely.

MR. GLAVINE: I got long answers, so I'm probably done, aren't I? (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we can allow you another question, if you have a short question.

MR. GLAVINE: Okay, very quickly. Talking about the turnip example there, of the gap in pricing there, it actually costs about 5 or 6 cents to grow a turnip. I use this example because this is the kind of thing now that we need to do on a bigger scale here in the province, because we can certainly grow turnip. Now, turnip is not something you'll find on a kid's plate very often - very seldom, if ever. It's something served at a church supper for seniors. There's a company in the Valley, Sawler Gardens, that took turnip and put it into turnip sticks and are now having it in school as a snack, eating it raw. They're finding that there's a growing demand for it.

I think on this whole issue of getting nutritious food into homes of lower income, we have to work with the farm community and we have to get people back to growing a little bit of their own food. One of the things that our Party did, along with a colleague from Mr. d'Entremont's Party - we both introduced a bill in the Legislature that would give farmers a 25 per cent tax credit for any food that was not going to be harvested or that was in a warehouse if they donated it to food banks. Our food banks don't always have the most

nutritious food, either; it is stuff that is outdated, et cetera, or getting close to end-of-date. This would put more nutritious food on the shelves of our food banks.

It is something that would be a little bit of an ask, to urge government to adopt it. Outright they said no, but even if they bring in their own bill or policy to do this, it doesn't translate into a lot of cost to government. But it's that little bit of an incentive that you'll pay somebody minimum wage to pick up the turnips, to finish picking the rest of the apples, et cetera, that were going to be unharvested or remain in a warehouse and not have a market for it. I think those are the kinds of small initiatives that we can advance and make for a better day for families who aren't getting good food on a regular basis.

DR. WILLIAMS: Can I maybe make a comment to that? I think that we absolutely need to improve the services that are offered through food banks. Food banks are here to stay for a while, but really, what our research and other research shows is that food banks are obviously not the answer, they're not getting at the root cause of the problem. We know that only a quarter of people who are experiencing food insecurity actually will go to a food bank, because of issues of pride, embarrassment, or stigmatization.

There's been a lot of research. Dr. Anne-Marie Hamelin has shown that food banks really render people powerless and help lead to alienation and shame; they feel judged. We've done some research here in the province that tells us that it's not a good experience for people to have to go stand in line at a food bank. Also, a lot of times food banks are only open maybe one day a week, or even certain days of the month in some areas, so it's not necessarily a reliable system.

I'm working with others on a large national study looking at food banks and other charitable food assistance programs, to try to look at how we can improve the system, but I really, truly believe that that's not the answer. We need to look at some of the underlying causes like income inadequacy, and really providing support at a community level that is going to build capacity and lift people out and enable them to have control of the way they get their food and be able to have more choice and so on, that you wouldn't necessarily get through food banks. I do agree with you that right now in our society they play an important role.

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, I agree. It's not the long-term answer, but in parts of the province with high unemployment and those kinds of challenges, it is a transitional part.

DR. WILLIAMS: We can't ignore it, for sure.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you both. That will take us to Mr. Ramey, followed by Mr. Skabar, just to keep it in order.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Thank you very much for coming. With my colleagues, I commend you on the report that you've written. If I could offer the comment that the fact it was brought up that you might have been pretty generous on the revenue side there in some cases, I really think that's to your advantage as opposed to your disadvantage. I really do. It gets very easy for people who maybe want to sidestep the whole thing to say, that's pie in the sky and all that kind of stuff. You didn't make it pie in the sky at all, you've made it a very real report and it brings home the problem. It also shows the complexity of the problem too. Many of my colleagues have already cited a number of those things.

I guess it's no secret to anybody that food prices are not just going to be a problem for Nova Scotians. They're a huge problem in the world and I think that's an even scarier thing than just food prices in Nova Scotia, although it's our own province and obviously it's dear to our hearts and we care about it. For example, in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and other countries around the world that are already experiencing some of this, that this can lead into all kinds of other really nasty things. It's a real problem, it's a serious issue and it's one we have to solve.

One of the questions I wanted to ask, when you were conducting the study throughout Nova Scotia, right across the province, were there particular areas where you noticed a significant problem or was it pretty universal right across the province, an everybody's-in-the-same-boat kind of thing?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yeah, what we found is there's no significant differences. If you look statistically across the different districts of the province, there's no statistical difference between districts.

MR. RAMEY: Okay. I have a question, I'll try to keep them short. In relation to seniors, I know one of the things we did, with people who were getting the Guaranteed Income Supplement, we took them off the provincial income tax rolls completely. I think it was 18,000 people that were affected by that. Does the problem seem to be more prevalent among seniors or is it the same right across the board again with regard to the various age groups of people?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, that's an area where it is a policy success in many ways. We have done a really good job as a country in decreasing the number of seniors living in poverty. But there are pockets of seniors who are at particular risk and if a senior doesn't have the information to access the Guaranteed Income Supplement, the GIS, then they're at risk and we know that is happening.

Also, from our research, we've shown that if seniors are living on their own and maybe don't have a full pension or are only reliant on one income, they're at particular risk of food insecurity or falling into a deficit.

MR. RAMEY: Okay, one more short snapper. Some of the tax credits, like the Affordable Living Tax Credit, the Poverty Reduction Tax Credit, the increase to the ESIA although it was never as much as you want it to be, and child care spaces and all the rest of that stuff that we've tried to implement - obviously there's still a big problem, but has some of that helped at all or has it had very little impact?

DR. WILLIAMS: We have done some looking at that because our results are until June 2010, and we have tried to sort of factor that in. We found that with the increasing costs, again, in some areas it might have made a little bit of a difference, but still families are still far off from where they need to be in terms of being able to afford that basic, nutritious diet. But we are planning to do more work to look at where the best leverage points the policy levers might be in terms of some of these things.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you, if we have time I'd like to have another whack at it later on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You'll be on the list again, Mr. Ramey, but we'll go now to Mr. Skabar and then back to Ms. Casey.

MR. BRIAN SKABAR: Thanks very much for your presentation, guys. Over the last number of years, we're more and more familiar with the situation of food security. Karen, I'm particularly aware of what happens with Maggie's Place and all the things that you and your colleagues do there.

Just kind of looping back from a family resource centre, I can understand there is some help in budgeting, and if a lot of families with children know what exactly a good food basket consists of, as opposed to just going to take things that the kids might like or might want or might point to? You mentioned earlier on that - and I'd like to get into local beef in a bit. You touched on that, but why, or is it an option, or did the schools just stop teaching or going into any kind of home economics?

MS. LEBLANC: It's not home economics any more, Brian. It's PAL.

MR. SKABAR: What happened with that?

MS. LEBLANC: Well, because it was too old-fashioned, basically. Girls are supposed to take home economics and boys are supposed to take industrial arts, when I went. When my children went, it's PAL, which is like life skills - Physically Active Lifestyles. They've done all kinds of things. Not one of my children came home and said - well, no, I shouldn't say that; they baked muffins once. But none of them came home and said, they taught me how to cook, they taught me how to measure, they taught me how to prepare anything.

I believe that a variety of educational things are great, but they need to get back to the basics with that, right? The children need to know how to feed themselves.

MR. SKABAR: How to feed themselves and what to feed themselves as well.

MS. LEBLANC: Right. I've dealt with a whole generation. We do cooking programs at Maggie's Place - at all family resource centres. We do cooking programs, we do nutrition programs, we do everything possible to teach people how to cook and what to cook and how to keep themselves healthy. What I've found is that we've gone through a whole generation of families where both Mom and Dad had to go out to work, the kids come home and open a can; that was the meal. So a lot of that skill has been lost. One of the things we strive to do is teach them how to take care of themselves again.

MR. SKABAR: So that could be something, then for any families that have come and actually taken the time; say, two minutes. Not only would this be better for us and the family, it might in fact be more - we might be able to afford it or come closer to being able to afford it.

MS. LEBLANC: Community kitchens and collective kitchens and community gardens and things like that, that's some of the key things that need to be done.

DR. WILLIAMS: Like I said, I do think those things are really important in terms of - what we've learned from working with family resource centres is that it's incredible how engaging people in hands-on kinds of activities around food has multiple benefits in increasing their food literacy and engaging them in other activities in their community. Also, the other side of it is that if families simply do not have the resources to purchase the food they need, you can give them all the education you want and they're still not going to be able to purchase that basic, nutritious diet or choose that healthy food. So it's sort of not one or the other.

MR. SKABAR: Of course, you have to have the chicken to put in the pot. It behooves me to this day - and my colleague across the room here was mentioning that when he was Minister of Agriculture, that to this day we can get beef from Argentina cheaper than we can from Frank Foster just down the road.

MS. LEBLANC: That was a true eye-opener for me, because I always assume when they have "local beef" marked on the beef in that store, that it came from the Maritimes and that I was supporting local. When I said, where's that beef from, he said, it could have been shipped here anywhere in 24 hours. So we don't eat beef from here anymore.

MR. SKABAR: Well, I think that's coming back again, with the price of fuel being what it is and transporting that and I know that that's certainly on the radar. As far as the feather industries go, again, we used to have quite a bit of poultry here locally, and I think

that's on the rebound as well. I do know for a number of my colleagues here, and certainly around the table and elsewhere, their top priority is food security. That has come up a number of times. How that will manifest itself we don't know yet but it certainly isn't unnoticed - be assured of that. Now again, you know, to what extent that can be addressed and how soon, well, we'll see.

Just a little thing here - again, kind of getting back to preparation. The Naked Chef can guarantee that he can prepare a better meal more economically, starting from scratch, in every single instance. Well, I don't know about that but one of the things with my own kids, cooking and kind of playing around in the kitchen is more of a social thing. They invite their friends over to make pancakes but not from a mix, or whatever else. Again, you still have to have the stuff, of course, but it's at least sort of - I think the biggest single issue, short of not having anything, is just getting foods of convenience like the can of stuff or the frozen pizzas, or whatever else, to address all those things. But having said that, it's not to belittle or diminish the basic requirements of being able to afford what you have to afford. So I just want to mention that we hear that - or I hear that, and I know many of my colleagues do as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Skabar. It's just that that discussion of kitchen gardens as one possible interesting element reminds me that in New Minas there's an organization called the Evangeline Club, which has decided to grow a kitchen garden, and they've been doing this for several years. The members of the club harvest the food and prepare it for freezing, then use the food to supply meals for themselves throughout the year. This is one tiny example of how just approaching things differently has huge values, I think, for the individuals who are involved. I mean there's a very important social and skill-development benefit from this, as well, but it also helps with nutrition in a fairly regular way I would say. However, it's Ms. Casey's turn.

MS. CASEY: If I could make a couple of comments and then I do have one question. I drove by my local church the other day and there was a big sign out that said: plant more in your garden, donate to the local food bank. So, you know, I think that's trying to make people more aware of the need to help the cause. A second comment, if I could, with respect to home economics in the schools and the fact that your children didn't go through a home economics class - I'm from the generation that did and I can tell you I didn't learn to cook in home economics (Laughter) I learned to cook from my mother in our own kitchen. But the component of home economics that is now taken out of that is in the Family Studies program and nutrition and so on. Anyway, just a little side comment.

My question has to do with your chart that has the affordable diet and it talks about the monthly expenses. I did a little bit of math here and there are nine items identified on that monthly expenses - only one of those is food related. I know this is a bigger issue than food related, but I'm looking at that and I'm thinking in order to make those monthly expenses more affordable and to better match the monthly income, which is what we're seeing as a significant deficit here, there is that need and you mentioned it for

cross-department awareness, and I guess acknowledgement that one department or one part of the monthly expenses will not solve the problem.

So my question to you is, with the report that you have, with the research you've done and with the findings that you have, how are you getting the message across to all, whether it's government departments or whether, as Chris mentioned here, to the other sectors - how are you doing that?

DR. WILLIAMS: In multiple ways, I would say. I mean this is a great opportunity to help us do that in terms of the message with government but recognizing that, you know, it does involve community groups and community researchers and government being able to work together. So this five-year project that we have is a real opportunity to be able to do that, to use our food-costing findings and engaging with a larger group of partners that are coming at it from a food-supply angle, coming at it from maybe more of a housing - some of those other expenses that factor into the family budget, and sort of being able to look at this complex issue and sort of try to put the pieces together. So that is one way and that's a provincial project that has national partners, so we're hoping to have local level dialogues, provincial dialogues and then national dialogues on the issue.

As well, over the last 10 years, every opportunity that we had taking these findings to local level discussions - and Karen has been doing work in her area and Debbie in Bridgewater - on what these findings mean in terms of the overall big picture of food security and sort of having the adequate income is sort of one aspect of that bigger picture but even just focusing on income adequacy. How do we achieve income adequacy when it is that one piece of it is so complex? So through our research we've tried to look at things like when you do have child care supports, it makes a huge difference for families. So there's some sort of key areas that our findings have highlighted that really do help families make ends meet.

MS. CASEY: You've done the research, you have the findings. The message is clear and you are now into the education and awareness and I guess kind of marketing - if you want to use that word - of what you have found. Have you given yourself a timeline to make sure that you have been able to touch every community in Nova Scotia with the results of this, so you know that you are educating, making aware and then getting the buy-in? Have you set yourself some kind of a timeline here?

DR. WILLIAMS: Well I think with this five-year community university research alliance project, we have certain goals related to that project in terms of not only creating the awareness and the knowledge amongst citizens in Nova Scotia but also hopefully engaging people in the issue so that they can take a stake in it as well. Beyond just building awareness, just really involving people in the issues so that they see that it impacts everyone, themselves and their own families, even though they may not be living in poverty or have concerns about being able to know where the next meal is coming from, that they can understand that it's going to affect them because it affects our health care

budget. It impacts our ability to you know be a viable province and a productive province into the future so getting that message but engaging people in taking action with others on the issue and what piece of the puzzle they can sort of address.

MS. LEBLANC: I think we've done a really good job engaging all of the province because the food costing was carried province-wide, from Cape Breton right down to Yarmouth and everywhere in between. Every region had either a family resource centre or somebody involved with it.

MS. CYNTHIA WATT: And just touching on that as well, food costing used to be done every year and we're now doing it every second year, so that the year in between, which is the year we're in right now, it is for that capacity-building component. Going out into the communities and actually meeting with community members and sharing the information and then having that dialogue, that's something we're working on this year. Then we will do the food costing again next year, to look at where we are at now and where do we move from here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Prest.

MR. SID PREST: If you were to estimate how many families are in the poverty line in Nova Scotia, would you have an approximate number?

DR. WILLIAMS: Well the *Cost of Poverty in Nova Scotia* report that came out recently estimates between - take the lower end around 75,000 up to 158,000, sort of depending on what you use.

MR. PREST: Families or people?

DR. WILLIAMS: I believe that is of individuals, yes.

MR. PREST: Now do you suppose those individuals would need some education and maybe training on how to prepare food and select food much better than they have been?

MS. LEBLANC: No, not every single one of them - some, maybe, but not every single one. My mother knows how to prepare food quite well and help select food quite well but they're on the poverty line because they are senior citizens.

MR. PREST: But if the food was made available - say, if you offered them a 50-pound bag of potatoes or a case of canned beans, which are they going to select?

MS. LEBLANC: It depends on the family. I, myself, would go with the potatoes, I hate beans. (Laughter)

MR. PREST: Potatoes, turnips, carrots, something that we have a surplus of here in Nova Scotia, we feed to the deer, we feed to the animals. We should be making that available and getting that to the families that could use it and need it.

MS. LEBLANC: At a dirt cheap price, and they'd certainly learn.

MR. PREST: So there's probably a lack of communication between the food producers and these families that are needing it, and the connection isn't being made.

DR. WILLIAMS: I think you're right, a 50-pound bag of potatoes would be great for a lot of families, and it could go a long way. But oftentimes, again, it comes back to the transportation - if they don't have access to a car to be able to get that 50-pound bag of potatoes, or a place to store it over a longer term, which is the case for many families that may be living in an apartment or whatever. So for some families that maybe would be a solution, but then other families, you know, maybe not so much.

MR. PREST: But as a province, if the product is there, the food is there, it should not be dumped because we can't get it to the family that needs it, should it?

DR. WILLIAMS: That's right.

MS. LEBLANC: If you had some way of getting that excess produce to the food banks, they would take it. We have fields of potatoes growing near my home, and quite often some of the potatoes are left in the ground because the company doesn't like them or whatever. We've gone carloads full and picked the potatoes or, you know, there will be a sign and somebody will call the centre and say, oh, we've got all these apples left over. So yes, transportation there is a big issue.

MR. PREST: So one more question. The families that are on assistance and struggling to get by, are they given any encouragement to try to get out and maybe earn a few extra dollars without being penalized?

MS. LEBLANC: That's the big thing - some of them are scared to. It's not just the clawback. When you've been on assistance for a while, you don't have to worry about things like child care, transportation, how good your clothing looks, things like that. Once you start working, and you start working in a minimum wage job, a lot of those safety nets are gone. You have to take care of your clothing. You have to pay for child care. You have to have some sort of transportation to get your child to child care and to get yourself to work.

Subsidized daycare spots are a wonderful idea; I love daycares. But the people who work shift work at Wally World - or Wal-Mart - that's not going to be good for them, because most daycares are only open from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. The people who have

to work after 6:00 p.m., they're not eligible for a subsidized spot. So there are all kinds of things that you have to think of when you're going back to work.

MS. DEBBIE SMITH: It has been my experience that for many of our families, that decision to go into the work world is a pretty scary one. I can think of at least a dozen families now who are working for minimum wage and who are far worse off than the families that are on income assistance. That's a scary piece, because how do we encourage people to feel good about themselves when we have the situation where the very things that would build their self-esteem and their self-confidence and their ability to care for their families are out of reach or so scary that they'll never reach out to do that?

That's a big consideration that we have to make in this province. How do we ensure that people do not lose whatever benefit it is that they have as they move forward into that new world of employment? How do we support them in moving into employment and skill building so that future generations aren't going to be facing some of the issues that we have right now?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Prest. I'm just looking at the clock. I have three people on my speaker's list: Mr. Burrill, Mr. d'Entremont, and Mr. Ramey. We have other business to attend to, and I would like us to move into that other business by 2:40 p.m., if that's acceptable to the group. Is that an okay timeline?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Sure.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Burrill.

MR. BURRILL: I was wanting to go back for a second to think about the research itself and what seems like its uniqueness. I was wondering if you would be able to comment a little about whether other provinces in Canada are able - as we are here, with these figures - to make these same levels of precise calculations about monthly deficits and surpluses? Or do we have a body of knowledge with this research that, in fact, puts us in a unique position for thinking about income inadequacy?

DR. WILLIAMS: I think we are in a unique position in the way we do food costing and it allows us to have, I think, better insight into what those affordability scenarios mean for families and what potential solutions are. The process we use is very rigorous in terms of the way we work with people and train people, the way we're able to come together with people in all areas across the province to look at the findings and have discussions about what they mean and then be able to apply that to a report and what we're recommending.

Food costing is done in other areas of Canada; not all areas, but there are affordability scenarios produced. In my discussions with colleagues across the country, they're not used to the extent and they're not as useful necessarily to the extent of what we have here in Nova Scotia.

MS. WATT: Just touching on that as well because I did work with food costing in British Columbia for two years and it's done very differently there. Dieticians and nutrition students actually do the collection of the data. While I was out there, it was really looking at Nova Scotia as, this is the model of how food costing should be done. They'd really like to adopt that, the process that we use. It's not as rigorous, it's done off the side of their desk because it's not given as much attention. I think our affordability scenario is coming into that, after being in B.C., this is very different and very much a leader within Canada.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you Mr. Burrill. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Two quick comments and a question. When going back to the food availability, or local product, because I love talking about Frank and his farm. The issue is government-created in a big piece for availability of these products and a Superstore or a Sobeys. We have this thing called federal inspection and the thing called the federal inspection, in my mind, is no better than provincial inspection but what happens is the Sobeys and Superstores tack onto the federal issue and use that as the excuse for their product. It needs to be federally inspected, to be through them.

I think government has a bit of a role to play there in trying to change that mentality, that local products are just as good if not better than that stuff that's coming from Alberta. The issue of Mr. Prest's comment of availability of product in our province - I think the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals put a very good option forward which is at least trying to help the farmers wash their cost of picking the rest of that crop or trying to find a way to use it, rather than throwing it out or using it for the deer.

There are a lot of apples and potatoes and those kinds of things that are available and we do have a distribution model which is, some of our food banks could be used for that. They would welcome that product coming forward. But the farmer has to have something to say that - I think most of them are on the poverty line to begin with, anyway. Any help they can get to get that product to market in some way or form, I think, would be welcomed by them.

The final question I do have revolves around one of the recommendations at the provincial level, which is examine the adequacy of the 250 subsidized child care spaces recently committed by the government. I'm wondering, examine it in what way? Is it not enough? I would guess it's not even near enough, but just a quick comment on that issue because ultimately we all know that you have to pull money from one place or another if you have to pay for your kid to go to child care - you're going to be taking it out of your food probably. I just want a quick comment on that. If 250 is not enough, how many should we have?

MS. SMITH: I think that every time we hear about more daycare spaces, we rejoice. The one piece that I could speak to about daycare needs, and Karen spoke to it, is about the shift workers. Regardless of how many daycare spaces we put in place, unless we

look at that scenario in a different way, we're always going to have that whole section of our population who aren't going to be able to access that and are having to look for different options, sometimes not such safe options.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you Mr. d'Entremont. Mr. Ramey, for what may be the last question.

MR. RAMEY: I'll try to be brief. It's more of a comment than a question I think. A couple things, you know, we talked about - I don't want to get back to the turnip again, we've used the turnip enough times, but I guess I will one more time. (Laughter)

We know the transportation costs have gone up, the cost of fuel and all the rest of it, but I do think sometimes people can lock onto something and use it as an excuse too. I mean something's 45 minutes away and all of sudden it's quite a lot more expensive, you ask why, and it's transportation costs or something. I'm not saying that's the case here but I know that can be used.

I also know when you're talking about growing food and things that we like to do with our own agriculture, we're sometimes even tied in with international agreements like NAFTA. You think, well, how is NAFTA affecting that? Well, I believe there are all kinds of things in the free trade agreement to keep you from doing certain things, or doing them the way you'd like to or maybe even the way you should, and there are penalties that are significant if you violate them, so there are issues around that.

Something that Mr. Morton said about the Evangeline Club - and, Debbie, I'm really glad you're here today. Debbie's a very good person who does very good work in my area, and it's nice to see you here. I got thinking of the area where I live, and I bet you it was like this in many of these rural areas - about 30 years ago everybody had a barn and they had a cow, a pig and some chickens. They had a garden and they canned stuff, and you rarely went to a store - in my own family it was like that. Of course, that has changed and we all know that.

My point is that on these drumlins there are still lots of arable fields, there's all kinds of land and nobody's doing anything with it, it's starting to grow in with trees. Sometimes I think it would be great if the family support centre could lease one of these fields for a very reasonable cost, and just plant her full and then the folks could maintain it, harvest it, and then use it. It would be very good for the land and it would be very good for the folks. I sometimes wonder if a pilot project like that couldn't be just given a shot? Try one and if it's a complete and utter disaster, then you may try again or you may say that didn't work. A lot of them are in very close proximity to urban areas, they're just outside. You go out two kilometres and there's a big old farmhouse that's fallen down, the barn's fallen down but the land is still there - anyway, enough said.

DR. WILLIAMS: I think there's actually some potential for pilots. (Interruptions)

MR. RAMEY: We've got some of those going, have we?

DR. WILLIAMS: There are some really great things happening across the province. The North End Community Health Centre - I see Paul O'Hara is involved with the North End Community Health Centre - they have a Hope Blooms project, a very large community garden engaging many youth in a very disadvantaged kind of area here in the city. There are examples in the Kids Action Program that I talked about earlier that has the Food Box Program, they also have a garden program where they are doing container gardening, they have a children's garden and a community garden. This year they're starting gardening in bags for families, to enable families to have access to some fresh produce.

MR. RAMEY: Super.

DR. WILLIAMS: These are the types of programs that I spoke about earlier that not only give people access to a little bit of extra healthy food but also engage children and families in discussions about food, learning about food, and working with others.

MR. RAMEY: It might create a farmer or something.

MS. LEBLANC: We may end up with a whole bunch of new farmers.

MR. RAMEY: Absolutely.

MS. LEBLANC: I'm a firm believer that everybody needs a chicken for their backyard and somewhere to plant something, even if it's just a tomato plant. (Interruptions) Yes, or a balcony chicken or something. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: I thought I had come to the end of my speakers list but Mr. Skabar has been . . .

MR. SKABAR: About another 40 seconds there - yes, a chicken in every yard. A couple little things where I certainly agree, that income support and (Inaudible) lots of food certainly isn't enough. I couldn't agree more that the working poor, those who are actually out there every single day, certainly deserve our consideration as much as anything, and any kind of break they can get.

Cumberland North is kind of a half rural/half Amherst area. I do stop into the co-op in Pugwash every now and then and take a look at prices. Now my guess is - and not to make any excuses for the co-op - there's a diseconomy of scale, they're buying their produce and stuff for much smaller areas, particular in the wintertime. I used to know this but I kind of got out of the rates for Income Support - I used to be in that business some number of years ago - but presumably the shelter allowance for rent and things like that in

the rural areas would be a little bit less. If that difference can be made up, you know, added to the other end for food costs - has that happened anywhere or is that a possibility?

DR. WILLIAMS: Ensuring more affordable housing?

MR. SKABAR: Well, you know, if a rent for a family of three in the greater Halifax area might cost like \$800, the rent in Pugwash might cost \$600 and, you know, as a consequence there could be a little bit more added to the food budget and still be roughly equal.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, our scenarios are provincial and so, you're right, it may cost a little less in terms of shelter but we've also found that the food basket costs more in rural areas, so some of the other expenses would probably be more. We have talked about doing scenarios for rural versus urban but I think overall the scenarios that we have now - you're probably going to get higher expenses and maybe, you know, I think it's not . . .

MR. SKABAR: So it balances out in your document then?

MS. LEBLANC: I think the rates are provincial, Brian. It's just one set rate for housing and one set rate for this one.

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes, it is.

MS. LEBLANC: That's what we think.

MR. SKABAR: So it might be worth a peek anyway. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we've come to the end of our time. It's really difficult to be the chairman and not to have an opportunity to ask questions and I think we've run out of time for me too.

MS. LEBLANC: Thank you all.

MR. CHAIRMAN: There may be some summary comments though, Dr. Williams, that you would like to make?

DR. WILLIAMS: Yes. We really, first of all, appreciate the opportunity to be here and to share some of the highlights of the work that we've been involved in over the last 10 years. There's a lot of momentum, as I said, right now in terms of the interest in this issue, a lot of groups and individuals across the province who are really engaged in this issue.

As I said, it is a real opportunity for you as politicians, in your role in government, to really be able to take a leadership role and to look at the potential for some of these initiatives that we've talked about to really work across government and engage across

sectors in terms of addressing this broader issue. I think that really one of the key things we really need to be thinking about is income adequacy. Making sure that we are, as a province, moving towards ensuring that every Nova Scotian is able to have a living wage and that we're able to take care of those most vulnerable in our society but that it is a bigger issue than that.

That's sort of the foundation for ensuring that people are able to have food security. But that we need to also build on the opportunities that we have to build capacity to build the knowledge and skills to be able to use food and learn about food and develop future generations that are more food secure than we currently are as a province. So thank you again for the opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much for being here and for the excellent work that you're doing and to everybody on this committee, as well as yourselves, for a thorough discussion that I think helped shine some light on a really important issue.

If we could, we'll take a recess for a moment or two so that you can move yourselves out and then we'll come back to do a little bit of other committee business.

[2:43 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:49 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll call the meeting back to order. Under committee business we have a couple of things to deal with. The first is just going back to some earlier correspondence, we had a letter, as you will recall, from Ms. Wendy Keen, the Executive Director of New Start, the Men's Intervention Association of Nova Scotia, with a request to appear. At the end of our last meeting we discussed that a bit. At that point we were of the understanding that Ms. Keen and her group had a meeting with the Minister of Community Services and the Minister of Justice.

In fact we understand that will happen. She has been in touch after we wrote, that they will be meeting with the two ministers on July 14. I hope that doesn't have anything to do with Bastille Day but they do plan to meet. I'm thinking at this point that they seem satisfied with that and the group understands, Ms. Keen understands that if they need more attention from us that they'll be in touch. Is that an acceptable way to leave things?

The other piece of business that we have is to begin the process of selecting witnesses for our next round. Maybe this is the time to remind us that we've agreed that we won't meet during the summer so our next meeting (Interruption) I know, it is too bad.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Oh, I'm not on the committee, I'm just here to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You might reorganize us to meet. (Laughter) Our plan is to meet next on September 13th at 1:00 p.m.

In terms of witnesses, I have in front of me two sheets of paper; one is a sheet that we've been using for witness selection. We've gone through most of that. At the end of the last meeting caucuses were asked to submit possible witnesses for the next round, I guess. I have another sheet of paper which has - I think you all have it in front of you at this point - four suggestions from the NDP caucus and one suggestion from the PC caucus. I don't think we have anything from the Liberal caucus at this point, unless there's something new here.

MR. GLAVINE: I'm just filling in. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: We're expecting more of you, Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I can give you topics.

MS. CASEY: Do we have a deadline? Have we missed the deadline?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, it was today, or yesterday.

MS. CASEY: Okay.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think the way we've typically handled this in the past is that it's a work in progress. We've tried to identify some items so that we can plan ahead and prepare witnesses to be here. My experience in the couple of years that I have been the chairman is that caucuses may identify fresh ideas that they think deserve attention and it is quite appropriate to bring those forward, of course. Sometimes those ideas come from the community, where there may be people who are experiencing issues or decide they would like to meet with us.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: And that's exactly what you see before us, that in our case having Delores Feltmate come in and talk about foster care was something new for us and I think has maybe a little more weight than the one we do have on our list right now. I think the one on the list today maybe can take a second on this one. It's one of those things that we need to be ready to move on, I guess.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. I know I was part of the discussion of the NDP caucus suggestions where what we did - and you see the numbers we ranked for us and the order in which we would give some priority to these things, which I assume my colleagues still agree with although sometimes things change. I'm seeing some nods, nonetheless.

Any thoughts about where we might go? We don't have anybody selected for September at this point. Does anybody have a proposal to make with where we go first?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Who was last? We've been going in a cycle, haven't we?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not exactly, I think we've reached the level of consensus or understanding about what is next, based on our thinking. I think the last idea, to be fair, though, did come from our NDP caucus, so that might suggest that the next way to go would be with Delores Feltmate, if that would be acceptable.

Mr. Burrill, you look like you might be about to say something.

MR. BURRILL: I was just going to say that I think this suggestion from the PC caucus is a fine suggestion. That group working out of the recommendations of the Maritime Conference of the United Church has a lot to contribute and a lot to say and it would be good to hear them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The voice of expertise speaking. So is that an acceptable objective for September, if the timing can be worked out?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Could we then go to, maybe if we look at the next one to the Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia as a potential witness? Okay.

Should we pick one more at this point? Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Well I'm just looking at the Liberal caucus' list as well. The Dartmouth Adult Services Centre would be probably an easy one to mobilize as well, so you might put that one on the list.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is that still something the Liberal caucus would be interested in having us do?

MS. CASEY: I would say yes. It was put on there by the caucus and so I would suggest there's been nothing else come from caucus to supersede that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What if we accepted those three as our plan which would cover September, October and November, which seems like a long way away at this moment? We could revisit this perhaps at the end of our September meeting and perhaps project a little bit further. Would that be an acceptable arrangement?

Seeing no objections to that, as I have already said, our next meeting will be September 13th at 1:00 p.m. (Interruption) My clerk is getting my attention. (Interruption) I think our understanding is that we have selected three and we have a suggested order, but if the availability is such that we need to change, we would understand that's necessary.

Our next meeting is September 13th at 1:00 p.m. and I look forward to seeing those of you who will be here at that point. The meeting is adjourned.

[1:56 p.m. The committee adjourned.]