

# The Cost of Healthy Eating in Saskatchewan 2006



**Food is a basic human need along with water, peace, shelter, education and primary health care. It is also a prerequisite for health.<sup>1</sup>**

It is well recognized that food security is a major determinant of health, and therefore has the potential to decrease the incidence of chronic disease, hunger and food borne illness.<sup>2</sup> However, it is not enough to focus on food choice or food intake; there is a need to address the root causes that impact the security, safety, accessibility, affordability, acceptability and nutritional value of the food supply itself.<sup>3</sup>

*Food Security exists “when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”<sup>4</sup>*

## **Food insecurity impacts physical well being:**

Food choices play a direct role in nutritional health and significantly influence health status. Food choices are not simply a matter of personal choice. Economic and social factors, coping skills, environment and working conditions all influence a person’s capacity to make food and nutrition choices.<sup>5</sup> Research indicates:

- Parents in food insecure households compromise their own diets to protect their children from hunger.<sup>6</sup>
- Children living in food insecure households have more stomach aches and headaches.<sup>7</sup> They report nearly twice the odds of “fair or poor” health and have almost a third greater risk of being hospitalized.<sup>8</sup>
- People who are food insecure are also more likely to have multiple chronic conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and mental health problems.<sup>9</sup>

## **Food insecurity impacts learning:**

Students learn best when they are well nourished, have safety and stability in their families and communities, are respected for who they are, and when their needs are being met.<sup>10</sup> Research indicates:

- Food insecurity and insufficiency can affect a child’s development. Critical periods of brain growth and development occur in gestation and early life making good prenatal and infant nutrition crucial.<sup>11</sup>
- Children deemed food insecure at kindergarten experienced impaired academic performance in reading and mathematics<sup>12</sup> and poor social functioning.<sup>13</sup>
- Students who eat breakfast at the start of the school day show a general increase in math and reading scores.<sup>14</sup> Hungry children are also more likely to be hyperactive, absent from and late for school.<sup>15</sup>



## **Food insecurity impacts mental well being:**

For all individuals, mental, physical and social health are closely interwoven. Mental health is crucial to the overall wellbeing of individuals and societies. Being part of a community and having the support of friends and family, a good job and a healthy environment have significant effects on our mental health. People are much more likely to be healthy if they live in communities where it is easy to make healthy choices.<sup>16</sup>

Social and economic exclusion happens when people do not have things they need to live comfortably and participate in society as valued, respected community members. For some this may mean not being able to share their food with family and friends. For others this may mean not being able to enjoy foods from their culture or foods that they want to eat.<sup>17</sup> Those who are excluded, whether because of poverty, ill health, gender, race or lack of education, do not have the opportunity for full participation in the economic and social benefits of society.<sup>18</sup>

Research indicates:

- Food insecurity affects relationships with others. Parents in food insecure households feel disruptions to family life, and experience feelings of alienation, deprivation, powerlessness and guilt.<sup>19</sup>
- Food insecure children also worry about food and fear being labeled poor or excluded from activities.<sup>20</sup> Food insecure adolescents experience more depressive disorders, and suicidal symptoms.<sup>21</sup>
- Food insecurity adversely affects a student's ability to participate in classroom and school activities, to feel a part of the school setting and to value what the school feels is important.<sup>22</sup> The emotional distress of being food insecure may interfere with school work: affecting both the ability to pay attention and to be motivated.<sup>22</sup>



## Why calculate food costs?

Calculating food costs provides information to help examine the financial barriers some Saskatchewan residents face to purchasing healthy foods.

## When was food costing conducted?

In June 2006, food costing was performed in a total of 99 stores throughout Saskatchewan. Locations included large and small cities, towns and villages as well as northern Saskatchewan communities. This report presents these survey results along with recommendations for how to use the report to help tackle food insecurity.

## Who organized food costing?

The provincial food costing initiative was a partnership between the Public Health Nutritionists of Saskatchewan Working Group and the Saskatoon Health Region - Public Health Services – Population Health Department Epidemiologist.

## How are food costs calculated?

The Nutritious Food Basket is a food costing tool that measures the cost of healthy eating.<sup>23</sup> It consists of a list of foods that are frequently purchased and make up a healthy diet based upon nutrition recommendations such as *Canada's Food Guide*. This “food basket” includes 66 foods used to estimate a basic nutritious diet for individuals and families.

## What can food costing tell us?

Costing of a nutritious food basket can help:

- assess the affordability of a nutritious diet for individuals and families.
- assist health and social agencies to monitor the cost and affordability of a nutritious basket of food for people of all ages including pregnant and breastfeeding women.
- assist policy and decision makers to develop health, nutrition and social policies.
- provide an effective educational tool for budget planning.<sup>24</sup>



## In 2006, how much did it a Nutritious Food Basket Cost in Saskatchewan?

On average, it costs \$172.53 per week or \$747.04 per month to feed a family of four a nutritious diet in Saskatchewan (see Table 1). There is an additional cost if a woman is pregnant or breastfeeding (see Table 2).

**Table 1:** Average Weekly and Monthly Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket in Saskatchewan by Age and Gender, 2006.

| Age (years) and Gender |        | Cost per week (\$) | **Cost per month (\$) |
|------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Child                  | 1      | 20.55              | 89.00                 |
|                        | 2-3    | 21.81              | 94.42                 |
|                        | 4-6    | 28.60              | 123.83                |
| Boy                    | 7-9    | 34.35              | 148.73                |
|                        | 10-12  | 42.28              | 183.07                |
|                        | 13-15* | 48.83              | 211.44                |
|                        | 16-18  | 56.81              | 246.01                |
| Girl                   | 7-9*   | 32.75              | 141.79                |
|                        | 10-12  | 39.03              | 169.02                |
|                        | 13-15  | 41.69              | 180.52                |
|                        | 16-18  | 39.81              | 172.39                |
| Man                    | 19-24  | 54.06              | 234.10                |
|                        | 25-49* | 52.36              | 226.70                |
|                        | 50-74  | 47.57              | 205.96                |
|                        | 75+    | 43.20              | 187.03                |
| Woman                  | 19-24  | 40.62              | 175.91                |
|                        | 25-49* | 38.59              | 167.10                |
|                        | 50-74  | 37.85              | 163.91                |
|                        | 75+    | 36.83              | 159.45                |
| <b>Family of Four*</b> |        | <b>\$172.53</b>    | <b>\$747.04</b>       |

\*\*Cost per month uses a factor of 4.33 weeks/month.

\*Family of Four includes two adults ages 25-49 and two children ages 7-15yrs.



**Table 2:** Average Weekly and Monthly Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket in Saskatchewan by Mother's Age, Stage of Pregnancy, and Breastfeeding, 2006.

| Mother's age (yrs) | Pregnancy and Breastfeeding | Cost per week (\$) | **Cost per month (\$) |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 13-15              | Trimester 1                 | 45.12              | 195.35                |
|                    | Trimester 2, 3              | 47.36              | 205.08                |
|                    | Breastfeeding               | 48.84              | 211.47                |
| 16-18              | Trimester 1                 | 45.15              | 195.49                |
|                    | Trimester 2, 3              | 48.18              | 208.64                |
|                    | Breastfeeding               | 49.47              | 214.22                |
| 19-24              | Trimester 1                 | 43.98              | 190.41                |
|                    | Trimester 2, 3              | 46.68              | 202.14                |
|                    | Breastfeeding               | 47.81              | 207.01                |
| 25-49              | Trimester 1                 | 42.12              | 182.37                |
|                    | Trimester 2, 3              | 44.57              | 192.97                |
|                    | Breastfeeding               | 45.49              | 196.97                |

\*\*Cost per month uses a factor of 4.33 weeks/month

### Limitations of the Nutritious Food Basket:

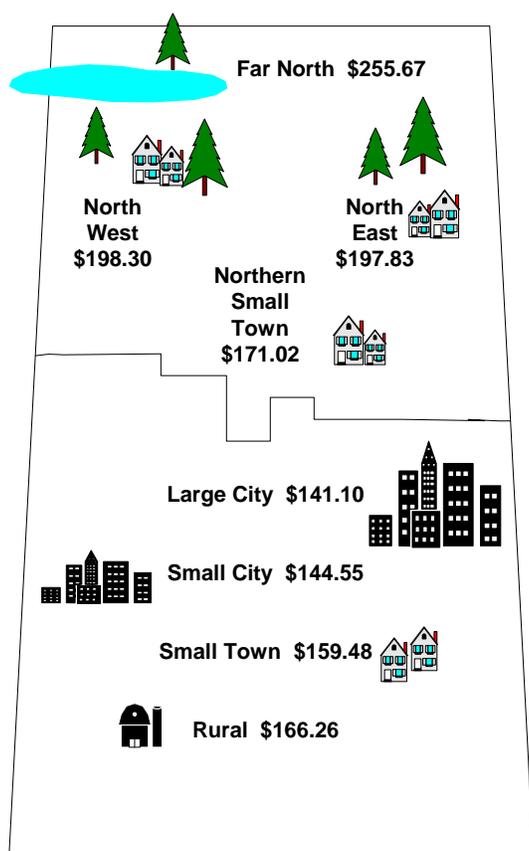
- The Nutritious Food Basket does not account for individual differences in activity levels, cultural food choices or special dietary needs.
- It measures low cost healthy foods and not pre-packaged convenience foods or restaurant foods. Therefore, if these foods had been included the food costs would have been higher. (According to a 2001 food survey, Canadians spend \$0.30 of every designated food dollar on restaurant meals.<sup>25</sup> This same survey found an increase in the use of convenience foods.)
- It does not account for other barriers to food such as transportation, cooking knowledge and food storage.
- While data from food costing can be used to estimate affordability of food in different communities and regions, it is not a tool for specific menu planning for individuals, groups or institutions.

Although there are limitations to this tool, the purpose of the Nutritious Food Basket tool is to provide a benchmark cost for **healthy** eating.

## Did geography affect weekly food costs?

- *Figure 1* shows the marked difference in food costs by geography. The northern part of the province had the highest food costs. Within the northern part of the province the far north had the highest costs (\$255.67) followed by the northwest (\$198.30), northeast (\$197.83) and northern small town (\$171.02).
- Food costs in the southern part of the province ranged from \$141.10 in large cities to \$166.26 in rural areas.

**Figure 1: Average Weekly Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket for a “Family of Four” in Saskatchewan by Geography, 2006.**



### AVERAGE COST TO FEED A FAMILY OF 4 FOR 1 WEEK

**Large city includes:** Regina and Saskatoon

**Small City:** >5000 population

**Town:** 500 – 5000 population

**Rural (Village):** <500 population

**North includes:** Athabasca Health Authority, Keewatin Yatthé and Mamawetan Churchill River Regional Health Authorities

## What is the situation for people with low income?

**Table 3: Monthly Income and Expenses for Five Households and Percentage of Income Needed for Shelter and Food.**

| Monthly income and expenses         | Household Type                     |                                  |  |                                  |   |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
|                                     | Tier A<br>One Adult Male           | Tier A<br>Family of 4            | Tier D<br>Single Parent Female with 2 kids | Tier D<br>Family of 4            | Min. Wage<br>Single Parent Female with 2 kids |
| Total income (\$)                   | 669                                | 1776                             | 1494                                       | 1795                             | 1810  |
| Cost of nutritious food basket (\$) | 187                                | 611                              | 603  | 865                              | 424   |
| % of income needed for food         | 28%                                | 34%                              | 40%  | 48%                              | 23%   |
| Cost of housing plus utilities (\$) | 358+98<br>= 456<br><i>bachelor</i> | 511+130<br>= 641<br><i>2 bed</i> | 381+130<br>= 511<br><i>2 bed</i>           | 354+130<br>= 484<br><i>2 bed</i> | 684+130<br>= 814<br><i>3 bed</i>              |
| % income needed for shelter         | 68%                                | 36%                              | 34%  | 27%                              | 45%   |
| % income left for all other costs   | 4%                                 | 30%                              | 26%  | 25%                              | 32%   |

*Tier A – Saskatchewan Income Assistance - Regina, Saskatoon and Lloydminster  
Tier D –Saskatchewan Income Assistance - other towns and rural area*

*Total Income – Sources of income may include:*

1. *Income Assistance (allowances for basic living, northern food allowance for Tier D residents, shelter, and utilities, as well as the average amount of any special shelter payments in excess of posted shelter maximums),*
2. *minimum wage earnings less deduction,*
3. *federal child benefit payment,*
4. *federal and provincial sales tax rebates, and*
5. *assistance provided under the Saskatchewan Rental Housing Supplement Program.*

*Rent:*

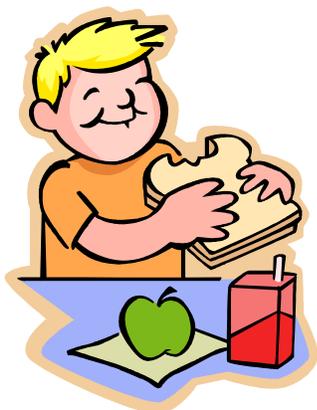
1. *Rental amounts for Saskatchewan Income Assistance recipients are the average amounts paid in June 2006, irrespective of whether these amounts were fully covered by shelter allowances.*
2. *Rental amounts for minimum wage recipients are based on Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Report – Saskatchewan Highlights, December 2006.*

- Table 3 shows, for households living on social assistance or minimum wage, after paying for shelter and food, there is little money left for other essentials such as personal hygiene products, household and laundry cleaners.
- Other monthly costs include educational expenses, clothing, footwear and transportation.
- This is especially evident for the single male living in Saskatchewan. His food and shelter expenses account for 96% of his income. (See Table 3).
- Even though food is necessary for survival, consumers may view food as the most flexible portion of a budget when faced with budget shortfalls.<sup>26</sup> Recent research indicates that in order to make ends meet, shoppers may choose items perceived as expensive (fruit, vegetables, and meat) less often.<sup>27</sup> This puts individuals at risk of inadequate nutrient intake.

## What is the situation for school nutrition programs?

Some Saskatchewan communities benefit from nutrition programs in their local school. These programs aim to enhance children's learning through adequate nutrition and are funded from various charitable organizations, government agencies or are self-funded.<sup>28</sup>

To assess the cost of food in nutrition programs in various geographic areas of Saskatchewan, a sample one week snack menu for school children was developed following the recommendations from *Nutrition Guidelines for Schools*<sup>29</sup> and incorporating foods from the Nutritious Food Basket. Each snack contains nutrient dense choices from two food groups of the *Canada's Food Guide*. The items from this menu were priced based on the 2006 pricing of the Nutritious Food Basket in Saskatchewan.



**Table 4 : Daily Food Costs for Snack Programs in Schools in Six Geographic Areas in Saskatchewan.**

| Geographical Areas               | Sample Snack Cost/Student/Day |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Saskatchewan South – Urban       | \$0.49                        |
| Saskatchewan South – Rural       | \$0.53                        |
| Saskatchewan Northern Small Town | \$0.54                        |
| Saskatchewan Northeast           | \$0.63                        |
| Saskatchewan Northwest           | \$0.67                        |
| Saskatchewan Far North           | \$0.89                        |

- As shown in Table 4, communities in the northern portion of the province require the most money to purchase nutritious food for school nutrition programs (ranging from \$0.54-\$0.89/day).
- In order to support a school nutrition program, schools whose funding falls below these levels would have to seek funding from other sources or sacrifice the quality or quantity of food.

### Limitations:

- The serving sizes are based on recommendations from *Canada's Food Guide*. This would be an appropriate serving for older children (grades 4 and older). Serving size and consequently cost/student would be lower for younger children (grade 3 and younger).
- Prices are based on package sizes from the Nutritious Food Basket. Some savings may be realized by purchasing in bulk.

### How to use this report:

This new information will give continued support to the issue of food security in Saskatchewan. The affordability scenarios in Table 3 show that families with low income would find it difficult to afford minimum amounts of nutritious foods to be **and** stay nutritionally healthy. So now what?

Get involved; use this report as a resource when you address food security issues in your area. Join others; numerous groups and people are taking action to build food security in Saskatchewan.



### Share this report with others:

- community-based organizations
- local food banks
- community medical clinics
- churches
- community schools

### Support the work of existing groups working towards or influencing food security for all:

- Anti-poverty groups or networks in Saskatchewan (e.g.) Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition [www.povnet.org](http://www.povnet.org)
- Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry [www.rapm1/sasktelwebsite.net/](http://www.rapm1/sasktelwebsite.net/)
- Food Secure Canada [www.foodsecurecanada.org](http://www.foodsecurecanada.org)
- Food Secure Saskatchewan [www.foodsecuresaskatchewan.ca](http://www.foodsecuresaskatchewan.ca)
- World Food Day [www.fao.org/wfd/](http://www.fao.org/wfd/)

**Work with individuals and communities to help people take action on issues that affect food security in their own communities.** *Program initiatives aimed at helping people make healthy choices succeed best when they include dialogue and discussion, and when they address not only individual behaviour but also the environmental conditions influencing it.*

- Provide programs, services and support for the nutritionally vulnerable, with a focus on reducing inequities that result in food insecurity.
- Consult “Thought About Food” – A workbook on food security and influencing policy. [www.foodthoughtful.ca](http://www.foodthoughtful.ca)
- Start collective kitchens, good food boxes, or community gardens.
- Purchase local foods whenever possible.
- Educate consumers about point of purchase sales and buying economical and nutritious foods.
- Learn more about local food charters. These documents put into words and actions what is needed for communities to achieve food security, democracy and food sovereignty.

**Support breastfeeding initiatives. Breastfeeding is the first and best strategy for food security. Breastfeeding is economical and benefits the health of the mother and child. Breastfed babies require less healthcare costs for the family. Develop policies that support breastfeeding in your community, wherever you live, work or play.**

- Breastfeeding Matters [http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your\\_health/ps\\_bf\\_support\\_services.htm](http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/ps_bf_support_services.htm)
- La Leche League <http://www.la lecheleague.org/Release/food.html>
- INFACT CANADA <http://www.info@infactcanada.ca>

### The Baby-Friendly™ Initiative in Saskatchewan.

In 2001, the Breastfeeding Committee for Saskatchewan identified the WHO/UNICEF Baby-Friendly™ Initiative (BFI) as a primary strategy for the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding. Its primary goal is to implement the Baby-Friendly™ Initiative in provincial health facilities (hospitals and public health).

In its recently release report, “Implementing Breastfeeding Initiatives in Regional Health Authorities in Saskatchewan,” the BFI report recommends:

- Creating an infrastructure in each health region to support the implementation of BFI.
- Health Regions develop a local implementation plan for the BFI in their region.
- Maintaining a provincial BFI Implementation Committee to oversee the implementation of BFI in Health Regions.

The Breastfeeding Committee of Saskatchewan has also developed a complementary strategic plan with the goal of creating a Baby-Friendly™ environment for all mothers and babies in our province.

### Advocate for increased access to healthy food choices in schools, recreational facilities, restaurants, grocery and convenience stores and worksites.

- Use Saskatchewan School Boards Association report “Nutrition Guidelines for Schools” to help ensure healthy food choices in schools. [www.saskschoolboards.ca](http://www.saskschoolboards.ca)
- Have open discussions with managers, food service workers and others about a nutrition policy in recreational facilities and worksites.
- Ask grocery and convenience store managers to bring healthy choices into their stores.

- Use Dietitians of Canada’s position papers on food security as background information and to support your work.
  - Individual and household food insecurity
  - Community food security
  - [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

**Advocate and lobby Federal, Provincial and Municipal government officials and community leaders to make policy changes that address food insecurity issues like affordability and accessibility.**

- Saskatchewan Health
- Saskatchewan Community Resources
- Saskatchewan Learning
- Local MLA
- Local MP
- Municipal leaders such as reeves, councilors or mayors

**A New Initiative in Saskatchewan**

Food Secure Saskatchewan (FSS) is a provincial organization that was formed to advocate for and work towards improved food security policies and programs. It supports and promotes food security through coordinated community-led action. FSS has a diverse membership including nutritionists, non-government organizations, First Nations, government departments, community leaders, food program volunteers, and farmers.

It is committed to stimulating policy changes and encouraging the development of a comprehensive, integrated food security strategy to allow for all Saskatchewan citizens to have just and dignified access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

If you are interested in starting a food security project, have questions about food security, or would like to share your food security initiative, please contact FSS through the website [www.foodsecuresaskatchewan.ca](http://www.foodsecuresaskatchewan.ca)



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