



HungerCount 2003

*“Something Has to Give”:
Food Banks Filling the Policy Gap in Canada*

Canada's Only Annual Survey of
Food Banks & Emergency Food Programs

The Canadian Association of Food Bank

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HungerCount 2003

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CAFB would not have been able to undertake such a comprehensive project without the continued involvement of hundreds of food bank staff and volunteers from every region of the country. We greatly appreciate the participation of everyone who contributes their energy year after year in our shared effort to bring an end to domestic hunger and food insecurity in Canada.

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THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FOOD BANKS: WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1985, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) is a national umbrella organization representing voluntary food charities, including nearly 250 member food banks. CAFB is the voice of food banks in Canada, with members and their respective agencies serving approximately 90% of people accessing emergency food programs nation-wide. While CAFB provides food for people in need on a day-to-day basis, we are ultimately working toward a hunger-free Canada. CAFB operates the National Food Sharing System, coordinating the shipment of food donations through voluntary transport to food banks across the country. CAFB also conducts research, engages in public education and advocates for public policy change with the goal of reducing and eventually eradicating the causes of hunger, food insecurity and poverty in Canada. CAFB does not receive core financial assistance from any level of government.

***HUNGERCOUNT* BACKGROUND**

Initiated in 1989, *HungerCount* is the only national survey of emergency food programs in Canada. It has been conducted annually since 1997. Released on World Food Day (October 16th) each year, the information the survey provides is invaluable, forming the basis for many CAFB activities throughout the year. Among many benefits, *HungerCount* allows CAFB to operate the National Food Sharing System on a “fair share” basis, present accurate, timely information to donors and media, and represent members’ key concerns at a variety of public forums. A leading barometer of hunger, food insecurity and poverty in Canada, *HungerCount* findings are used throughout the year by community-based organizations, government, researchers, media and the corporate sector.

HUNGER FACTS 2003

➤ MORE DEMAND NATIONALLY

- Number of people using a food bank in *one month* of 2003: **777,869**
- Population of New Brunswick: **756,650**
- Increase in use since 2002: **5.5%**; since 1998: **9.01%**; since 1989: **105.8%**
- Number of food banks: **639 (482 in sample)**
- Number of meal programs open in March 2003: **450**
- Number of provinces & territories *without* a food bank: **0**
- Years since Canada's first food bank opened in Edmonton: **21**

➤ MORE DEMAND REGIONALLY

- Highest provincial per capita food bank use: **Newfoundland at 3.58%**
- Percentage of food bank users in cities >100,000 people: **63.5%**
- Percentage of food bank users in areas <100,000 people: **36.5%**

➤ CHALLENGES MEETING DEMAND

- Percentage of food banks with difficulty meeting demand: **40%**
- Number of pounds of food distributed in one month: **7.03 million**
- Number of meals served in one month: **2.29 million**
- Full-time equivalent jobs provided by volunteers in one month: **12,473**

➤ MORE WORKING FAMILIES

- Percentage of food bank users with jobs: **12.9%**
- Annual income of a four-person family needed to live in a large city at Statistics Canada's (2002) "low-income cut-off" level (LICO): **\$30,576**
- Number of provinces/territories with minimum wage rates above the LICO: **0**
- Percentage of food bank users receiving social assistance: **55.8%**
- Number of provinces/territories with welfare rates above the LICO: **0**
- Monthly cost of groceries for a 4-person family (Dieticians of Canada): **\$629**
- Actual monthly amount a family receiving social assistance has in Ontario for groceries, after paying (CMHC) average rent: **\$203**

➤ MORE HUNGRY CHILDREN

- Percentage of food bank users who are children: **39% (306,552)**
- Likelihood that a food bank recipient is a child: **+2 in 5**
- Years since the federal government promised to eliminate child poverty: **14**
- Change in the number of hungry children since then (1989): **+155,552**

Canadians "seriously concerned" about domestic hunger (Totum Research Inc., 2003): **67%**

Number of "food bank" mentions in Parliament from Jan/01 to June/02 (Hansard): **1**

Percentage of donations to CAFB spent on charitable work: **+90**

Amount of government funding for CAFB core operations: **\$0**

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INTRODUCTION

Food Bank: *A central warehouse or clearing house, registered as a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing, and distributing food, free of charge, directly or through front line agencies which may also provide meals to the hungry. Food banks may also coordinate advocacy, public education and employment programs, as part of the effort to eliminate hunger.*

Affiliated Agency: *An organization that regularly receives a supply of groceries from a central food bank for direct distribution to the public.*

Grocery Program: *The distribution of groceries from food banks to the public. Food “hampers” or bags of groceries are provided with enough food for several days (at most).*

Meal Program: *The distribution of prepared meals to the public. May be operated by a food bank, or another agency, such as a soup kitchen, hostel or shelter.*

The Canadian Association of Food Banks’ (CAFB) *HungerCount* survey is the only annual measure of hunger and food insecurity in Canada. Food banks in every province and territory, from rural and urban areas alike, participate by providing data on the extent of emergency food bank and food program use in their communities. The information they provide captures 75% of emergency food recipients who are relying on more than 639 food banks and 2,648 affiliated agencies across the country to meet the most basic of needs. This vast and diverse network of non-governmental providers shares one common experience above all others: recipients depend on them because they do not have sufficient income to purchase the food they need for themselves and their families. At the same time, food banks are the first to acknowledge that they are not the appropriate vehicle for ensuring that the right to food is realized.

HungerCount goes beyond simply presenting the most current data, to highlighting the range of comprehensive public policy solutions that must be implemented if food banks are ever going to be able to close their doors (See Section 6, “Discussion”). Despite some positive announcements from the federal government in the last year, *HungerCount* reveals that the use of food banks and food programs continues to grow.

Food Security: *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.*

Food Insecurity: *The inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet of quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.*

The Right to Food: *The right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety. (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food)*

Social Inclusion: *A concept being widely used to develop and strengthen social policy frameworks in Canada and Europe. In the context of hunger and food insecurity, obvious consequences of social exclusion, the right to food must be recognized and met in order for social inclusion to be fully realized.*

We also know that the numbers of people experiencing food insecurity is even greater than the *HungerCount* survey reveals, as many people in need are either unable to access a food bank, or draw on other resources, such as friendship networks.ⁱ However, as it is the only annual, national survey that exists, CAFB will continue to conduct the *HungerCount* in order to monitor and respond to the demand facing emergency food providers, and as a means of evaluating the progress of our federal, provincial and municipal governments in acknowledging and addressing wide-spread hunger in Canada.

Additional research has confirmed the existence and extent of hunger and food insecurity in Canada. The National Population Health Survey (NPHS) found that 2.5 million people had compromised diets in 1998/1999, and an additional half million people “worried” that they would go hungry due to a lack of income.ⁱⁱ The federal government acknowledged the existence of the problem when it recommitted to the *Rome Declaration on World Food Security* in 2002, at the “World Food Summit: five years later” meetingⁱⁱⁱ. And yet, the number of food banks and the demand being placed on them has only increased each year. Until this trend is reversed, social inclusion will not be a reality in Canada.

The Canadian public knows and cares that hunger exists, proven by the tremendous generosity shown many times each year during community “food drives”. A recent independent research poll commissioned by CAFB found that 90% of Canadians believe that government is responsible for finding solutions.^{iv} The burden of ending hunger cannot lie with food banks alone – we believe, as does the Canadian public – that solutions lie in the implementation of public policies that address income and specifically, poverty. On the eve of the 2004 federal election, please join us in taking this year’s *HungerCount* to your candidate for Member of Parliament, and ask what they plan to do to eliminate hunger, food insecurity and poverty in Canada (See Appendix 3,

Action Tools). In the meantime, as people are hungry today, CAFB will continue to distribute food through its National Food Sharing System, but in order to draw attention to the underlying causes of hunger, food insecurity and poverty, we will persist in highlighting the public policy solutions that will lead to change.

The following pages outline *HungerCount's* methodology, followed by national, provincial/territorial and local trends in emergency food program use and operations. The report closes with a public policy update and discussion of crucial issues, and provides key resources for next steps.

METHODOLOGY

Each year since 1997, CAFB has invited every food bank in Canada, both members and non-members, to participate in *HungerCount*. The *HungerCount* survey takes place in the month of March each year to allow comparisons in use patterns over time. March was initially selected as the study period because it is considered to be an unexceptional month without predictable high or low use patterns.

As the study evolves, CAFB updates its database of Canadian food banks. New food banks, location changes and closures are documented to arrive at an up-to-date list for survey distribution. New food banks are identified by current participants, provincial coordinators from across the country, CAFB staff and board members, and through media searches. In February 2003, CAFB staff and coordinators mailed the 18-item survey to 581 food banks and affiliated agencies, located in every province and territory in Canada.

Food bank use is measured by counting the total number of individuals who received groceries from food banks and affiliated agencies during the month of March. Each person is counted only once regardless of the number of times that they received food bank assistance during the study period.

Other questionnaire items measure staff and volunteer hours contributed during the study period, frequency of food bank use allowed, days worth of food provided, number of prepared meals served, coping strategies to meet demand, income sources and family composition of food bank users, and local trends in food bank use. Although CAFB measures the total number of prepared meals served during the study period, the *HungerCount* survey is not a census of all meal programs in Canada and therefore greatly underestimates meal program activities on a national level. Totals reported provide some measure of the extent of meal program use as operated by food banks and their agencies.

The *HungerCount* survey was expanded in 2003. Food banks were asked to identify public policy initiatives that would have the greatest impact on alleviating hunger in their region. Food banks had an option of selecting initiatives from a list and including others that were not provided to them.

Throughout the spring and summer, a team of coordinators from every province collects surveys and verifies information. Most coordinators are CAFB Board members with years of experience and are employed by large food banks or food bank networks in their respective provinces. Their expertise helps to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the survey data. Coordinators forward completed surveys to the CAFB for data entry and analysis. CAFB staff and coordinators contact non-responding food banks to encourage their participation and clarify information. Food banks reporting large increases or decreases in emergency grocery program or meal program use are also contacted to verify figures and gather further information regarding these trends. In a small number of cases where actual grocery program figures are not available, coordinators provide conservative estimates, where possible, based on newspaper reports, previous food bank use and population statistics.

NATIONAL HUNGERCOUNT RESULTS

According to the federal government's Market Basket Measure, released in May 2003, 13% of Canadians are "low-income" - unable to afford a range of necessities, including food (based on Health Canada's 1998 Nutritious Food Basket), housing, clothing and footwear, transportation and various sundry items.^v This is not news to Canada's emergency food providers, who assist hundreds of thousands of people each month. The following results of the 2003 *HungerCount* survey focuses on food bank and food program use and operations, and provides information about food bank users.

FOOD BANK USE

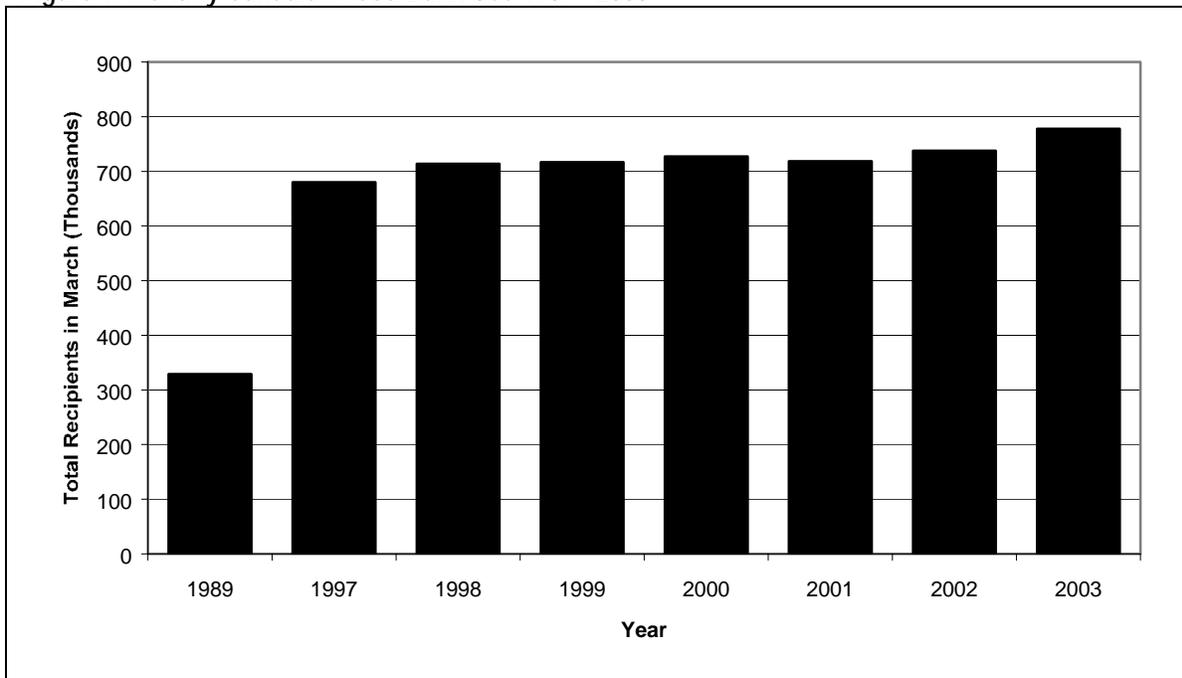
There are 639 food banks with more than 2,648 affiliated agencies currently operating in Canada (Table 1). In 2003, 482 food banks took part in the *HungerCount* survey, resulting in a national participation rate of 75.4%.

Table 1: Food Banks in Canada

Region	Total # of Food Banks (excluding agencies)	# of Food Banks Participating	% of Food Banks Participating	# of Agencies of Participating Food Banks served
British Columbia	105	88	83.8	174
Alberta	81	54	66.7	340
Saskatchewan	16	14	87.5	4
Manitoba	37	33	89.2	262
Ontario	248	165	66.5	720
Quebec	17	16	94.1	994
New Brunswick	41	27	65.9	30
Nova Scotia	45	43	95.5	64
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100	5
Newfoundland/Labrador	36	30	83.3	55
Yukon	2	1	50	0
Northwest Territories	3	3	100	0
Nunavut	2	2	100	0
Canada Total	639	482	75.4	2,648

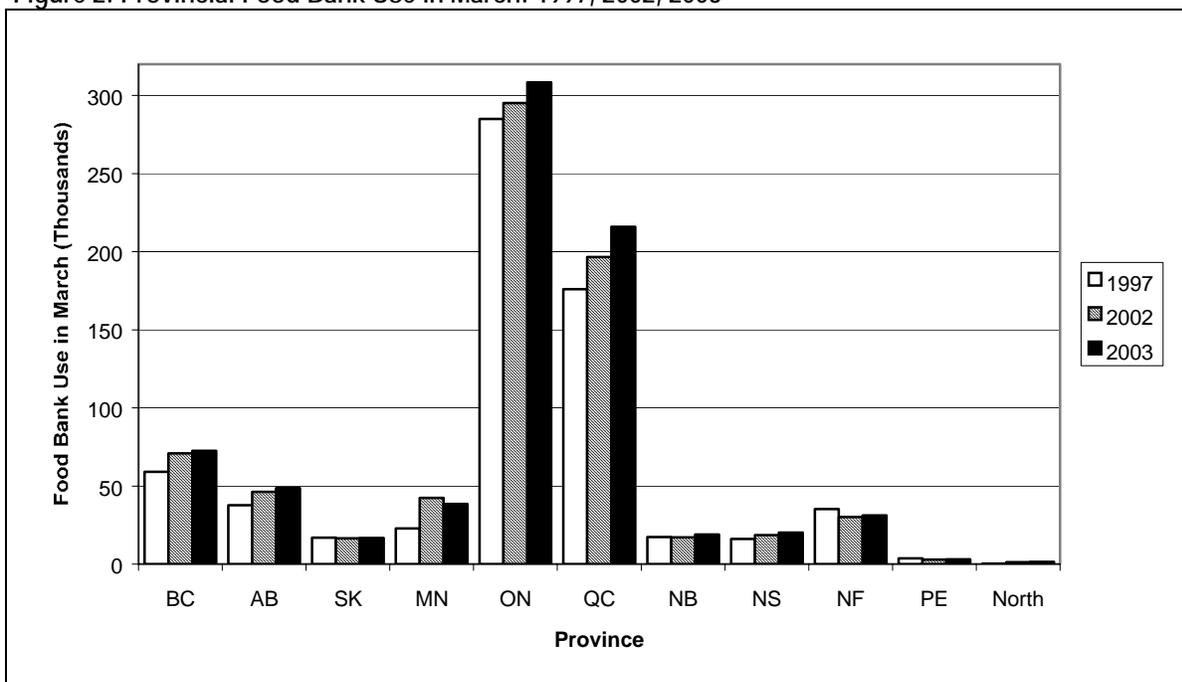
In March of 2003 alone, 777,869 people received groceries from a food bank, a 5.5% increase since 2002. Since 1989, this number has more than doubled (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Monthly Canadian Food Bank Use 1989 - 2003



This nation-wide increase of the total number of food bank users in March 2003 reflects an increase in usage since March 2002 in every province and territory except Manitoba and Nunavut. The most significant increases since March 2002 occurred in Quebec and Ontario, as Figure 2 shows. While decreases were reported in Manitoba and Nunavut, in the month of March, provincial coordinators reported an increase in demand overall, on an annual basis (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Provincial Food Bank Use in March: 1997, 2002, 2003



HungerCount also compares food bank use to population by province to determine per capita food bank use (Figure 3). By province, the greatest increase over five years since 1998 was found in the Northwest Territories at 429.4%, followed by Alberta at 33.6% and Manitoba at 17.7% (Figure 3). Using 2001 Census data, food bank use in Canada increased to 2.59% of the national population, from 2.4% in March of 2002.^{vi} As a percentage of the provincial population, Newfoundland food banks continue to assist the largest number of people in the country at 6.1% followed by Manitoba at 3.4% and Quebec at 3.0%. Table 2 provides the total number of people assisted by food banks by province or territory, including data on households and individuals. Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, the provinces with the largest populations, continue to assist the greatest share of recipients.

Figure 3: Provincial Food Bank Use as % of Population in March: 1998, 2001, 2003

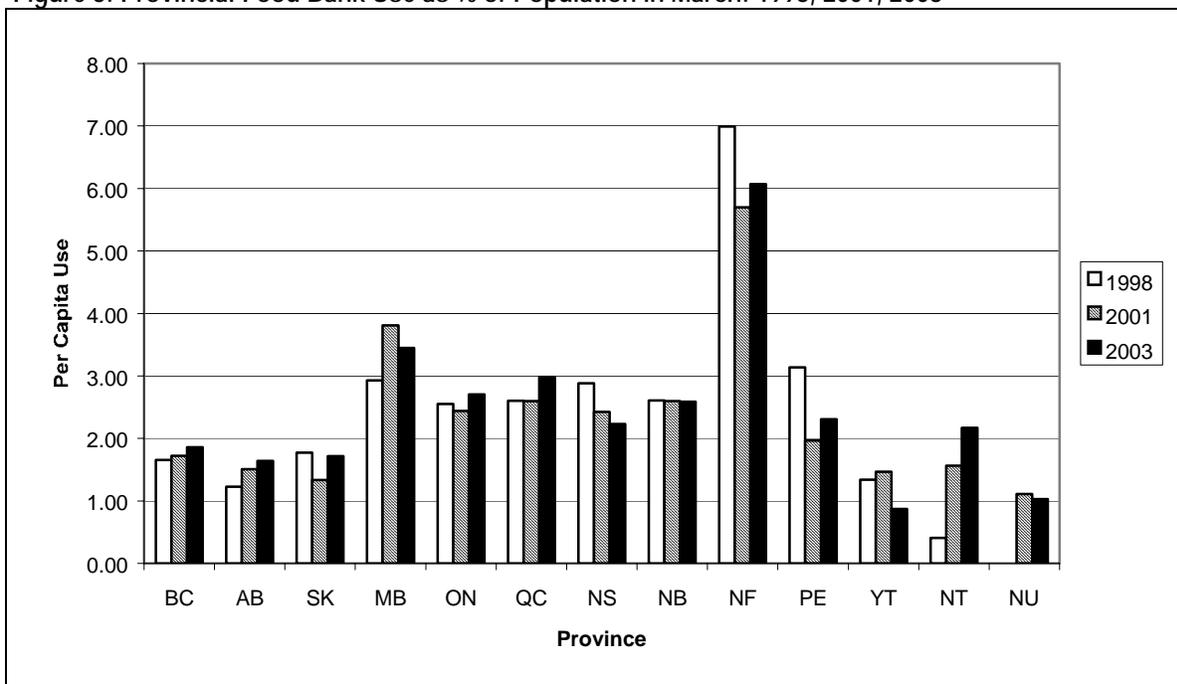


Table 2: Total Number of People Assisted by Food Banks in March 2003

	All Food Banks			Food Banks Reporting by Age			
	Total Assisted	Share (%)	Total Households	Adults	Children	Total Assisted	Total Respondents
British Columbia	72,573	9.33	27,470	29,946	18,568	48,514	88
Alberta	48,743	6.27	18,115	28,021	20,668	48,689	54
Saskatchewan	16,792	2.16	6,670	8,896	7,896	16,792	14
Manitoba	38,584	4.96	17,165	20,657	17,839	38,584	33
Ontario	308,452	39.65	70,012	178,068	130,384	308,452	165
Quebec	216,000	27.77	87,419	133,674	82,205	215,879	16
New Brunswick	18,875	2.43	8,734	12,008	6,407	18,415	27
Nova Scotia	20,263	2.60	8,294	12,221	8,040	20,261	43
NFLD/Labrador	31,132	4.00	10,056	18,388	12,744	31,132	30
Prince Edward Island	3,118	0.40	1,100	1,974	1,144	3,118	6
Yukon	249	0.03	N/a	81	168	249	1
Northwest Territories	810	0.10	195	433	377	810	2
Nunavut	275	0.04	60	72	112	184	3
Canada Total	777,869	100	255,290	444,439	306,552	750,991	482

MEAL PROGRAM USE

Many food banks administer meal programs in addition to managing emergency grocery distribution. *HungerCount* provides an indication of the depth of food insecurity in Canada by asking food banks to report whether they or their agencies provide this additional service, but it must be remembered that it is beyond the scope of the survey to capture the many meal program providers operating independently of food banks. Among food banks and their affiliated agencies, in March 2003, 477 provided meals in addition to groceries. Of these, 450 were able to report the number of meals they provided – a total of 2.29 million across the country in March 2003 alone. This is a 0.04% increase from the almost 2.2 million meals provided in 2002.

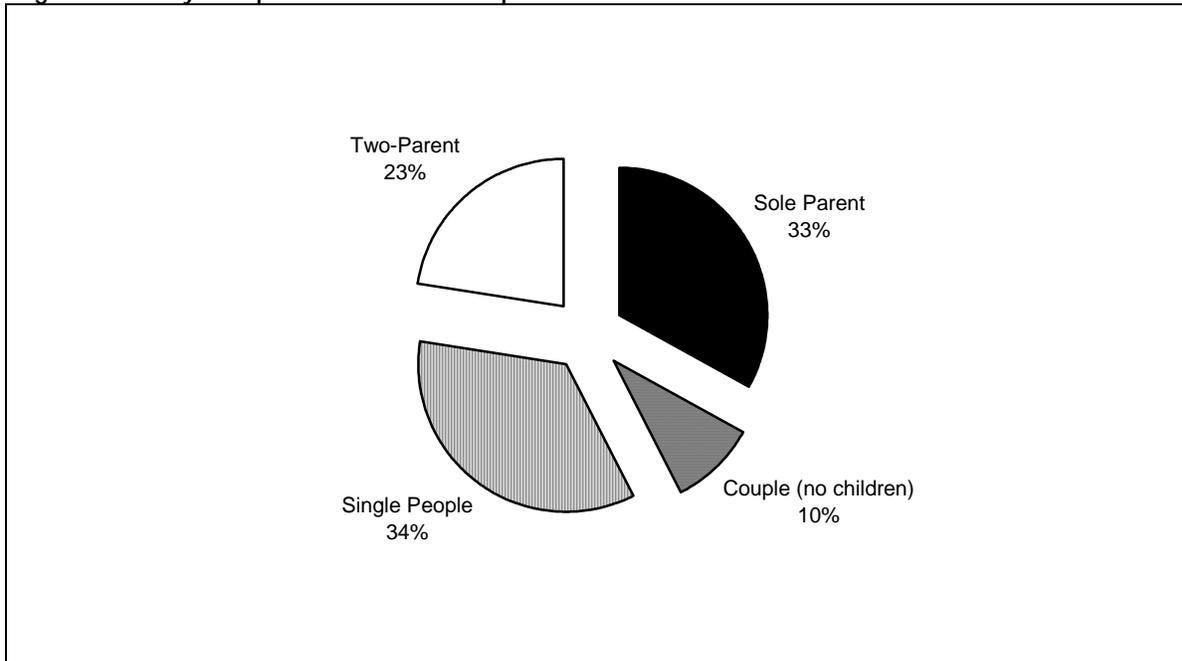
FOOD BANK USERS: INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES & SOURCES OF INCOME

Who is using food banks? Of the 777,869 people who received emergency groceries from a food bank in March 2003, 306,552, or 39%, were children under 18 years of age (Table 2). From March 2002 to March 2003, the number of children accessing food banks increased by 1,505. Contrary to the recent optimistic findings indicating a decline in child poverty to 1 in 6^{vii}, reliance on food banks has grown among low-income families, indicating that those children already living in poverty are growing up in even more dire circumstances. Child hunger in Canada is also greatly disproportionate to their share of the overall population of 7,778,875, at 25.9%.^{viii} By province, the greatest number of children assisted by food banks lives in Ontario at 42.5%, followed by Quebec at 26.8%, Alberta at 6.7%, and British Columbia at 6.1%.

University and college students also comprised a significant proportion of food bank users at 3.4%, based on a weighted estimate provided by 382 food banks. Senior citizens also continue to rely on food banks at 6.8% of users, based on a weighted estimate provided by 386 food banks (Appendix 2, Table 3). Based on weighted estimates of 426 food banks providing emergency grocery programs, 49.8% of recipients are families with children, 31.4% are single people and 8.6% are couples without children.

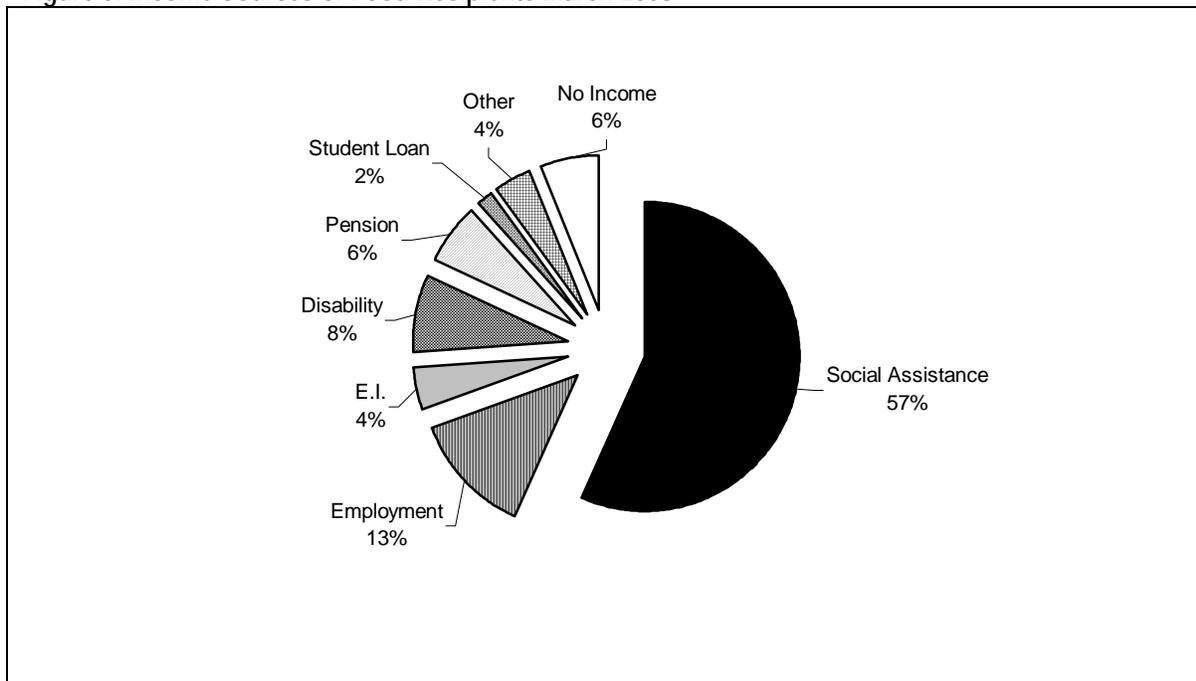
HungerCount also looks at family composition: singles, couples without children, single parent families and two parent families (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Family Composition of Food Recipients March 2003



Increasing numbers of food bank users are people with employment income (Figure 5). Based on a weighted estimate with data provided by 385 food banks, 12.9% cited a job as their primary source of income, a 1.0% increase from March 2002. The majority of food bank users, however, cite social assistance as their primary source of income. Other sources of income include employment insurance, disability assistance, pensions, student loans, or in some cases, no income at all.

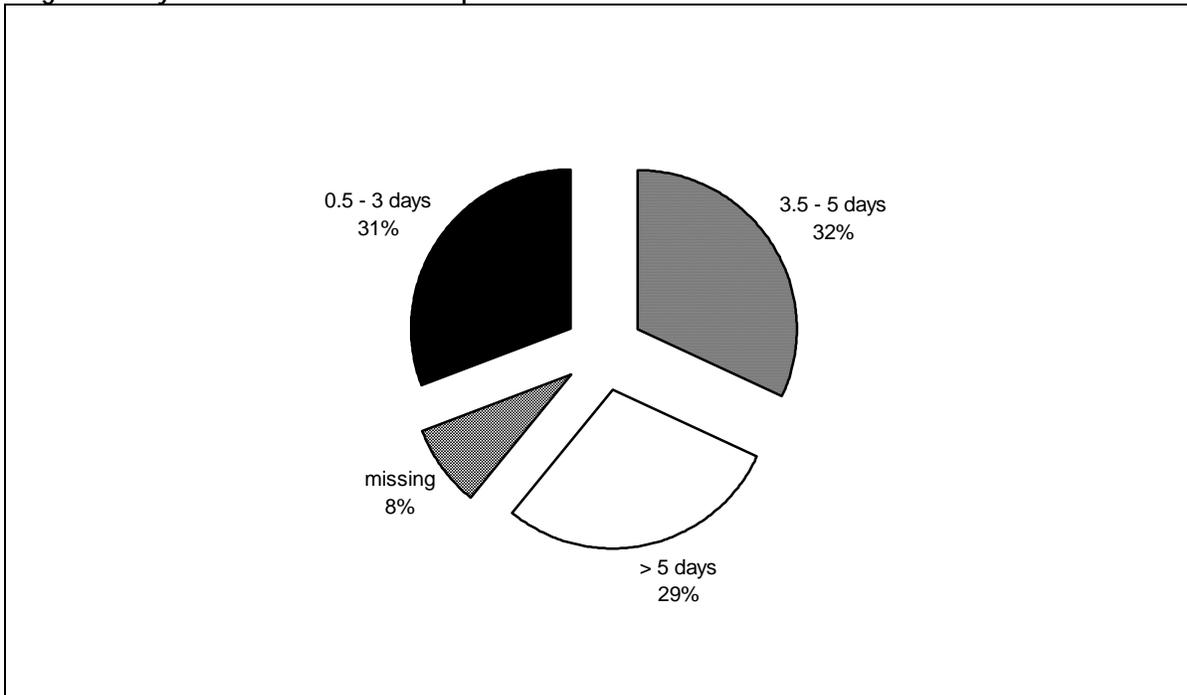
Figure 5: Income Sources of Food Recipients March 2003



FOOD BANK OPERATIONS

How do food banks keep up with this growing demand? Many, quite simply, cannot. As Figure 6 shows, most can only provide a few days worth of food.

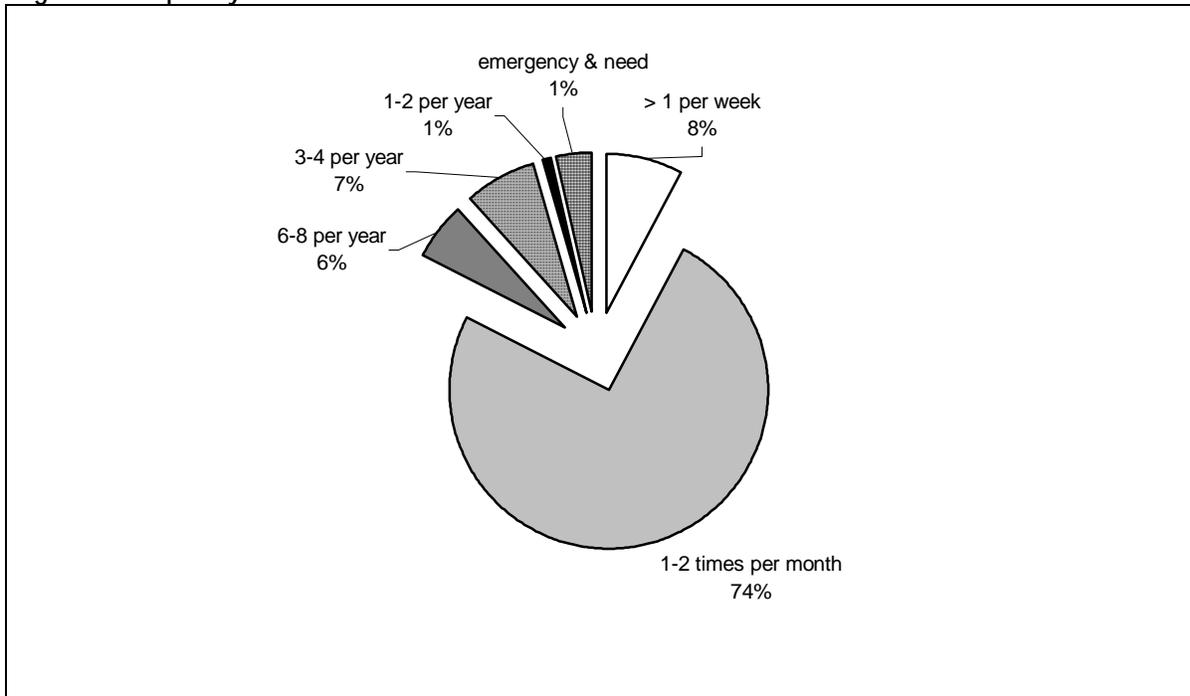
Figure 6: Days Worth of Food in a Hamper March 2003



Based on the weighted estimate provided with information from 442 food banks, the average (median) food bank provides 4.0 days worth of food in their food hampers.

In addition, most food banks limit the frequency with which one can access emergency groceries in order to ensure the greatest number of people receive at least minimum assistance.

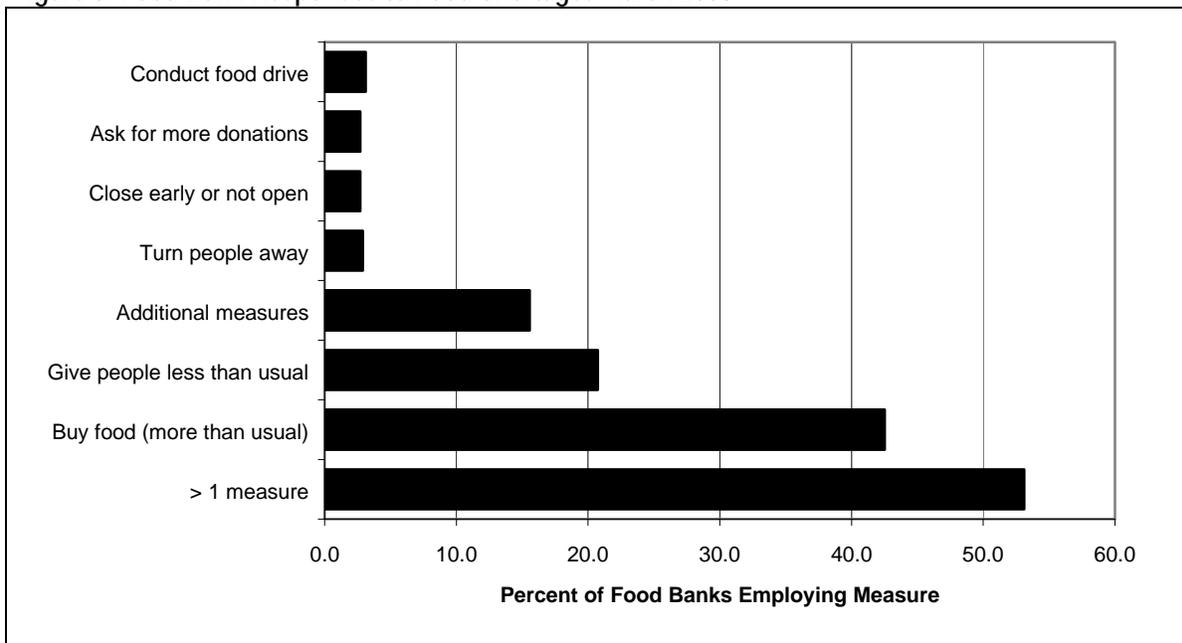
Figure 7: Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted March 2003



As a general rule, food banks that provide smaller hampers allow more frequent visits, and those providing larger supply of groceries permit less frequent use. Based on a weighted estimate provided by 482 food banks, the majority limit use to once or twice per month (Figure 7). However, most food banks will avoid turning away people in need, and instead take various actions in order to meet demand.

As Figure 8 demonstrates, 53.1% of food banks were at risk of being unable to meet the demand in their communities in March 2003, and were forced to take additional steps to remain open. In addition, 40.2% of food banks reported that there was still not enough food after taking additional steps. The majority purchased food when they usually would not do so, depending on available financial resources. Others provided food for a shorter duration of time, closed early or had to turn people away. Many took other emergency measures, such as initiating food drives. In all circumstances it remains a challenge to provide people with adequate and nutritious food that meets federal government nutritious food guidelines.^{ix}

Figure 8: Food Bank Responses to Food Shortages March 2003



Food banks are found in every region of Canada - urban, suburban and rural alike. Some food banks operate as warehousing and distribution depots, providing corporate and individual food donations throughout a region, while others serve to distribute groceries directly to individuals. Respondents indicate that new food banks continue to open each year – since *HungerCount 2002*, 19 have opened. In each case, the significant contributions of volunteers and staff are essential to their operations. Based on the weighted estimates of food banks, 431,696 paid staff hours were necessary to keep food banks open across the country in March 2003 alone. In addition, based on the weighted estimate of 466 food banks, 467,749 volunteer hours – the equivalent of 12,473 full-time paying jobs – were crucial to food bank operations (Appendix 2, Table 3).

PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL HUNGERCOUNT RESULTS

As a national organization, CAFB focuses primarily on social and economic policy that emerges from the federal level of government. However, some public policy initiatives transcend jurisdictions, and this is particularly the case when it comes to the economic access to food. Each province and territory's particular circumstances are explored below, incorporating regional *HungerCount* data and a "state of the province/territory" report from provincial food bank coordinators. The section closes with a brief discussion of the challenges facing local governments across the country. In *every* region, food banks report that inadequate minimum wage and social assistance rates, followed closely by high rents, are among the primary reasons for the growing demand for emergency food assistance.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Food Bank Trends

One of the highest rates of low-income in Canada is found in British Columbia, according to the federal government's Market Basket Measure, at 20% of the population.^x There is little surprise, then, to find that in 2003, the number of food banks rose to 88. In March 2003, 72,573 people used a food bank in BC – an increase of 2.4% since 2002, and an increase of 22.9% since 1997.

Policy Issues

With the election of the Liberal government in 2001 came several key policy changes to social assistance. While new restrictions had already been introduced in 1995/1996 under the previous NDP government, Premier Campbell's government went further still, announcing budget savings in January 2002 through a combination of more cuts to welfare benefits and further tightening of eligibility, as well as reducing the public service and 30% of the Ministry of Human Resources budget over three years.^{xi} Combined with an unprecedented new two-year "time limit" rule (within a five year period) and a two-year "independence test" (requiring new recipients to prove financial independence for the two prior consecutive years), these changes indicate a major threat to a basic human right.^{xii} Food banks have been left to address the shortfall created when people cannot purchase their own food due to insufficient income. According to one recent study, even prior to these changes, families who were working but earning minimum wage were paying a disproportionate share of their income for shelter *and* food compared to other Canadians.^{xiii}

Robin Campbell, BC's provincial *HungerCount* coordinator reports,

Low-income people are really seeing the impact of the social assistance reforms that began last year and continue this year. BC food banks are reporting higher numbers and a huge increase in recipients returning to food banks before their distribution day because their cupboards and refrigerator are empty. The people coming to food banks for hampers are talking about their inability to survive on the meager welfare they receive – they can't feed their families, they have no money to look for a job (transportation, clothing, resume reproduction, etc.), and they have inadequate housing. They feel angry and helpless, unable to see a way out - they don't feel supported at all. The mental health of our clients is of concern - the depression and lack of hope has had an impact on many.

ALBERTA

Food Bank Trends

In Alberta, almost 12% of the population is “low-income”, using the Market Basket Measure.^{xiv} In March of 2003, 48,743 people visited a food bank. This is an increase of 5.3% since 2002, and a 29.7% increase since 1997.

Policy Issues

Alberta’s approach to social assistance continues to be a major concern for its food banks. The province also continues to “claw back” the National Child Benefit, depriving families receiving social assistance of much-needed income. In addition, as in many other provinces, there is a clear increase in the number of people who are employed that are also reliant on food banks to meet their basic needs.

Sarda Sahney, provincial *HungerCount* coordinator comments,

Overall, food banks are seeing an increasingly large share of working poor. This has been largely attributed to the rising cost of utilities and housing costs throughout the province. The growth of Calgary has been akin to the boom in Vancouver, and Edmonton is not far behind. Utilities and rent costs are issues for more rural populations, too.

SASKATCHEWAN

Food Bank Trends

Almost 14% of Saskatchewan’s population is “low-income”, according to the Market Basket Measure.^{xv} In March of 2003, 16,792 people visited a food bank, a 1.3% increase since 2002, and a 0.9% decrease since 1997.

Policy Issues

The farming community in Saskatchewan has been especially hard-hit. Recovery from the 2002 drought was followed by BSE and the prohibition against Canadian beef in the U.S., which aggravated the economic problems many farmers experience. Inadequate social assistance rates, including the shelter allowance component, have also contributed to the rise in demand for emergency food assistance.

Bob Pringle, *HungerCount* coordinator for Saskatchewan, notes that the improvements they have observed are tempered by problems that remain:

We’re encouraged that the number of single person users is down, which is likely due to the two unprecedented increases to the minimum wage rate in 2002. However, we’re still losing ground with single parents, seniors, and in some areas, students. Increasingly, people on social assistance are falling further and further into poverty. And of course, agricultural workers have faced substantial hardship. In 2002, Saskatoon unanimously endorsed a food charter, adopted the right to food principle, and is working with the food security coalition. We’re hopeful that this momentum will continue until the right to food is recognized by all levels of government.

MANITOBA

Food Bank Trends

In Manitoba, the Market Basket Measure shows 13% of the population to be “low-income”.^{xvi} In March of 2003, 38,584 people visited a food bank, a 9.1% decrease since 2002, and a 69.8% increase since 1997.

Policy Issues

In June 2003, Manitobans elected Gary Doer’s NDP government for a second mandate. Unlike other provinces, among its key promises was a commitment to raise the minimum wage on a regular basis. While this is a step in the right direction, the speed at which these increases will be implemented remains a concern. A higher minimum wage is essential to ensure economic access to food.

Manitoba’s provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, Heidi Magnuson-Ford states:

Food bank workers say their clients are mostly affected by the lack of local training programs, limited employment opportunities and an inadequate minimum wage.

ONTARIO

Food Bank Trends

According to the Market Basket Measure, Ontario’s poverty rate of 11% is one of the lowest in Canada,^{xvii} and yet the demand for food bank assistance has not declined. In March of 2003, 308,452 people visited a food bank, a 4.5% increase since 2002, and an 8.2% increase since 1997.

Policy Issues

Since 1995, many Ontarians have found employment, but a decade after the minimum wage was increased for the last time to \$6.85 an hour, many are nonetheless living in poverty. The 21.6% cut to social assistance rates in 1995 were felt strongly by food banks, which saw an immediate increase in demand. Today, current welfare rates fail to meet the cost of both rent and food as measured by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and by the Nutritious Food Basket, calculated by public health units in each community across the province.^{xviii} To compound these problems, the Eves government continues to “claw back” the National Child Benefit Supplement.

There is room for cautious optimism with the election of the McGuinty government in October 2003. In their campaign the Liberals promised to create 20,000 new affordable housing units and to end the claw back of the National Child Benefit Supplement. The Liberals also promised to create the Ontario Mortgage and Housing Partnership to encourage developers to build more affordable housing. Further, the Liberals plan to introduce a housing allowance program to help low-income families finance a portion of their housing expenses. During the campaign, however, the Ontario deficit was projected at \$4.5 billion. Exactly how this development will affect McGuinty’s campaign promises and the implications for Ontario’s poor and homeless will be determined as the Liberals take office.

Sue Cox, *HungerCount* coordinator for Ontario, feels there is cause for concern:

The rising number of food bank users is symptomatic of the provincial government's failure to create adequate living conditions for all Ontarians. We need immediate action from the new government to address the shortage of affordable housing, and increase welfare and the minimum wage. It remains to be seen if McGuinty will improve on the abysmal legacy of the Harris-Eves years.

QUEBEC

Food Bank Trends

At almost 12% of the population, Quebec's low-income population is among the smallest in Canada, according to the Market Basket Measure.^{xix} Yet 216,000 people visited a food bank in March 2003, a 9.9% increase since 2002, and a 22.7% rise since 1997.

Policy Issues

In December 2002, Quebec's National Assembly adopted a unique law to combat poverty and social exclusion. Bill 112 was championed by a network of organizations to make poverty reduction a governmental policy priority. The framework includes a *National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, a fund to support social initiatives, an "Observatory," and an Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion.^{xx}

How this law will be implemented by the Liberal Charest government, elected in April 2003, remains to be seen. However, many Quebecers are not optimistic, as the popular "\$5 a day" childcare program has already been threatened, and a new focus on welfare recipients who "refuse" to work could reduce or rescind benefits.

In late December 2002, the Supreme Court of Canada considered for the first time, in *Louise Gosselin v. Quebec*, whether it is a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to deny low-income people of adequate social assistance, depriving them of their basic needs, such as food and shelter. As some members of the Court indicated that Canada has a legal obligation to provide adequate welfare benefits, many organizations are hopeful that the Supreme Court will continue to hear similar challenges in the future.

Maryse Lizotte, *HungerCount* coordinator for Quebec, believes there are several reasons for the increase in food bank use:

The closure of lumber mills and the loss of jobs that ensued are contributing to the breakup of families and the general impoverishment of the population. The government must offer help by reducing the number of hours necessary to qualify for social assistance and also by increasing the minimum wage.

NEW BRUNSWICK

Food Bank Trends

In New Brunswick, the Market Basket Measure found almost 14% of the population is low-income.^{xxi} In March of 2003, 18,875 people visited a food bank, an increase of 10.2% since 2002, and an 8.4% increase since 1997.

Policy Issues

New Brunswick's soaring insurance costs were a key concern that nearly cost the Conservative government the June 2003 election. As many people in the province living in smaller communities are car-dependent, these costs translated into a greater demand at local food banks. Unemployment continues to be a problem for New Brunswick, which had the second-highest level in the country at 11.1% in August 2003.

The continuing reduction of fishing quotas in combination with the poor fishing season has had a dramatic impact on local economies, especially in the northern part of the province. As a result, New Brunswick has experienced a significant increase in food bank use.

Bill Cockburn, provincial *HungerCount* coordinator for New Brunswick notes,

The hunger situation in New Brunswick is not going away. We remain concerned about the lack of government appreciation for the urgency of these issues. The situation is especially serious because of the troubled state of the provincial fishery.

NOVA SCOTIA

Food Bank Trends

In Nova Scotia, the Market Basket Measure shows 16.1% of the population is low-income.^{xxii} In March of 2003, 20,263 people visited a food bank, a 9.9% increase since 2002, and a 25.2% increase since 1997.

Policy Issues

Nova Scotians continue to face unemployment pressures caused by a loss of industry in the province. Minimum wage rates are also among the lowest in the country. In addition, the high costs of gas and oil are leaving less money for food and shelter. The August 2003 election highlighted the concerns that many Nova Scotians had about Premier Hamm's emphasis on income tax cuts while the social infrastructure is deteriorating.

Dianne Swinemar, provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, is worried about the rapid increase of food bank users:

Growth in and of itself is not a positive in the world of food banking. We no longer have a cargo van for food distribution – we now have a fleet of vehicles. Our food registry is not simply that PC in the corner – it is now a network of servers and of course, our warehouse can now better be described as a physical plant dealing with refrigeration, reclamation and food storage. We are a \$13.8 million dollar operation. Almost 30,000 people in Nova Scotia rely on our members for a portion of their monthly grocery support. More families are coming more often, suggesting that their circumstances have deteriorated.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Food Bank Trends

In Prince Edward Island, the Market Basket Measure shows 14.6% of the population is low-income.^{xxiii} In March of 2003, 3,118 people visited a food bank, an 11.4% increase since 2002, but a 15.7% decrease since 1997.

Policy Issues

A modest 3% increase to social assistance in the province is a step in the right direction, but remains inadequate. Lack of employment also continues to be a major barrier to reducing food bank use. Where people are employed, an inadequate minimum wage continues to be a major concern. The re-election of Pat Binns' Tory government in late September 2003 suggests that much will remain the same, especially since there was little discussion of poverty and homelessness in the recent provincial election.

Provincial *HungerCount* coordinator Mike McDonald describes,

On the Island we see an increase in food bank use. We can only see this trend continuing with high unemployment, low wages and a 13% rate increase for electricity in April 2003.

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

Food Bank Trends

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Market Basket Measure finds 23.4% of the population is low-income, the highest rate in Canada.^{xxiv} In March of 2003, 31,132 people visited a food bank, a 3.2% increase since 2002, though an 11.4% decrease since 1997.

Policy Issues

The lack of employment opportunities continues to be a significant challenge in Newfoundland and Labrador. The devastation of its once lucrative fishery, the loss of 12 per cent of its population to out-migration in the last decade, and double-digit unemployment in each of the last 30 years are all major contributors to food insecurity in the region. In early July, the Royal Commission on "Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada" released its report, calling for a renewed partnership with the federal government as the foundation for its "Pathway to Renewal", a starting place to challenge the broad economic and social disparity experienced in the province, and between the region and the rest of Canada.

Provincial *HungerCount* coordinator Eg Walters explains,

Food banks throughout Newfoundland and Labrador continue to face many challenges as they try to fulfill their mandate of helping the less fortunate among us. Major centre are, for the most part, able to access a regular supply of food products to fill client hampers. On the other hand a number of rural food banks are continuing to struggle with the task of generating adequate food donations within their community. With higher unemployment levels, and somewhat lower economic growth we are seeing more frequent requests for increased assistance for these areas.

THE TERRITORIES: YUKON, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES & NUNAVUT

Food Bank Trends

Market Basket measures of low-income are not available for the Yukon, Northwest Territories (NWT) and Nunavut, but food bank operators can attest that this does not mean food insecurity does not exist in Canada's North. In March of 2003, 1,334 people visited a food bank, a 5.8% increase since 2002.

Policy Issues

Among the key initiatives in the territories are: (1) In the Yukon, the 2003-2004 Throne Speech highlighted rebuilding the economy and formalizing the government-to-government relationship with First Nations. (2) The NWT has benefited from a robust economy in the early-1990's, with the government making investments in housing and income supports, and promoting its "Social Agenda" initiative, developed with Aboriginal groups and non-governmental service providers. (3) In Nunavut, the government is taking a four-pronged approach, emphasizing healthy communities, simplicity and unity, self-reliance, and continuing learning.

MUNICIPAL HUNGERCOUNT RESULTS: URBAN & RURAL PERSPECTIVES

URBAN CHALLENGES

As the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has often emphasized, local government is an integral part of the national structure, the level of government closest to citizens and as a result, is in the best position to involve them in the making of decisions concerning their living conditions.^{xxv} Similarly, Canada's food banks are locally-based organizations serving the needs of people in their own communities, integral to the lives of hundreds of thousands of people each year. And yet, Canada's municipal governments, particularly those of its largest city-regions where 80% of our population resides, have the fewest resources of any level of government to ensure their populations are food secure, free from hunger and poverty.

It is in local municipalities where senior governments' neglect of the right to food is experienced most acutely. Metropolitan areas with more than 100,000 people are home to 63.5% of Canada's food bank users. In the largest city-regions, the Market Basket Measure requires the income of a four-person family to be highest in Vancouver (\$27,800), Toronto (27,300), Ottawa (\$26,500), Halifax (\$24,600), Calgary (\$24,200), Winnipeg (\$22,800) and Montreal (\$22,400).^{xxvi} The 2003 *HungerCount* found 70 food banks and affiliated agencies in communities with populations of more than 100,000 people. Of these, 18 food banks are operating in city-regions with more than 1 million people: Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. Initiatives such as the Toronto Food Policy Council's "Food Charter" have generated great interest, committing Council to key principles and actions.^{xxvii} And yet, until senior governments grant municipalities the powers and assistance they are demanding as part of the emerging urban agenda (for example, investing adequately in affordable housing), there will be limits to their ability to contribute to solutions, particularly in those policy areas that fall outside of their immediate jurisdiction. Until this changes, food banks will continue to be needed to fill the policy gap.

RURAL HUNGER

In 2003, *HungerCount* found 411 food banks and affiliated agencies in communities with populations of less than 100,000 across Canada, that account for 36.5% of the country's food bank users. Of these, 214 food banks are operating in communities of less than 10,000 people, 44% of all food banks (Appendix 1, Map 1).

Food insecurity is not just an urban issue. Fortunately, Canada does not see the same extreme disparity in food bank demand between rural and urban areas as elsewhere. Yet the reality is that many Canadians living outside of our city-regions find themselves food insecure. The cruelest irony is that many people who are going hungry reside in our nation's food growing and producing regions – and are often direct participants in the very activities that feed their neighbours, as well as people across Canada and around the world.

It is almost easy to overlook that one-fifth of Canadians - over 6 million people - live in small and rural communities. In almost every province, the living expenses of a family of four are higher in areas with fewer than 30,000 people than in the region's major urban centre.^{xxviii} Nation-wide all of our communities face similar challenges that are starkly apparent in the hunger statistics that show ever-increasing numbers of people, including children, are reliant on emergency food programs. Many people living in smaller or rural communities face additional stresses due to the nature of

non-urban life. For instance, in some regions, it is more difficult to access social supports because of the greater distances between centres. For the same reason, people may be more car-dependent – an extra expense that is unavoidable in these regions. At the same time, there is often a more limited range of employment opportunities. Combined, these features contribute to the socio-economic vulnerability of residents of smaller or rural communities, and to the subsequent rise in food bank reliance.

POLICY UPDATE

Past *HungerCount* reports and various CAFB publications have articulated the need for the federal government to introduce a comprehensive approach to policy that addresses the multiple aspects of income security needed to achieve food security, and outlined the economic and social consequences of inaction for all Canadians (See *HungerCounts 1997 - 2003* at www.cafb-acba.ca). CAFB has also emphasized the need for the introduction of specific, concrete and measurable objectives with timelines to monitor progress as part of a substantive national strategy to eliminate hunger, food insecurity and poverty. The tables below outline CAFB's primary policy positions, as articulated in the *Position Statement on the Rome Declaration on World Food Security & Canada's Progress on Its Domestic Commitment to Improve Access to Food (June 2002)*, and the responses of government to date:

I. THE CANADA HEALTH AND SOCIAL TRANSFER (CHST)

CAFB Position	2003 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Replacement needed of CHST block funding transfers to provinces with transfers including individual amounts earmarked for social assistance & social services, health care & education. ➤ Reinstatement of mandatory national standards needed as conditions for social assistance funding: (a) receipt of welfare must be based solely on need (b) no residency requirement (c) a welfare appeals process (d) no forced work for welfare (e) assistance levels adequate to meet basic needs. ➤ Establishment by the federal government of a process needed to ensure provincial conformity with standards & restoration of funding levels to the 1995-1996 pre-CHST levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The 2003 federal budget announced that in 2004, the CHST would be divided & replaced by a Canada Health Transfer (CHT) & a Canada Social Transfer (CST). ➤ The change clarifies transparency & accountability for health spending, but has not addressed these issues for the CST ➤ The CST may contribute to a new "social architecture" & discussion of "basic income" initiatives to address poverty.

II. LIVING WAGE JOBS

CAFB Position	2003 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Government must help create & support living wage jobs. ➤ A rise in contingent & low-wage work arrangements, including casual, part-time, contract & temporary jobs, has led to more "working poor" people without adequate access to food. ➤ Government should establish a policy to ensure that government contracts be awarded to companies that provide living wage jobs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provincial minimum wage rates remain well below the poverty level, whether using the Market Basket Measure, the Low-Income Measure or Low-Income Cut-Offs. ➤ No federal dialogue evident in 2003 to address the need for living wage jobs.

III. NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

CAFB Position

- Government must implement a national housing strategy that meets the needs of Canadians & ensures the right to housing.
- Adopt the 1% Solution for the federal government to devote 1% more of its total budget to housing, & encourage provincial and municipal governments to follow their lead.

2003 Update

- Neither the 1% Solution nor national strategies have been introduced.
 - The 2003 budget provided \$320 million over five years for its Affordable Housing Initiative – providing only \$80 million during the first two years.
 - The government renewed its commitment to its existing community homelessness initiative allocating \$128 million each year for three years for rehabilitation of existing units.
-

IV. EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM (EI)

CAFB Position

- Substantial reform of the Employment Insurance (EI) program needed to ensure that workers who pay into the program are able to access their own benefits in the event of job loss.
- An equitable program, outlined by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), would “protect workers in all forms of employment; insure unemployment, pregnancy and parental leave, temporary sickness and income support while training; end UI discrimination against women, youth, older workers and workers in seasonal industries; protect at least 70% of the unemployed; remove features that blame the unemployed for their layoff; simplify the program, & ensure a benefit structure & financing of UI that reflects regional unemployment differences.”

2003 Update

- EI surplus is being used to pay down the federal deficit rather than improving benefits to workers who paid into it
 - Despite the \$40 billion surplus, & paying into the program, many are forced to seek social assistance in the event of job loss.
 - The conditions for equity outlined by the CLC have not been met.
-

V. ECONOMIC ACCESS to REGULATED CHILD CARE

CAFB Position

2003 Update

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The federal government must ensure access to regulated child care by (a) providing provincial governments with adequate, stable & long-term funding (b) introducing mandatory national standards to ensure quality of service delivery & (c) by establishing a mechanism for ensuring provincial compliance with those national standards. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The 2003 budget indicated the federal government will create a national child care program out of \$935 million dedicated over five years (only \$100 million is dedicated over the first two years). ➤ As federal-provincial negotiations take place, acceleration of the funding is much-needed. |
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VI. THE NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT (NCB)

CAFB Position

2003 Update

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Significant encouragement of the federal government to prevent the lowest-income families – those receiving social assistance – from being deprived of the NCB at the provincial/territorial level. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The 2003 budget announced an increase to the NCB maximum to \$3,243 over a five-year period, short of a \$4,200 adequacy benchmark proposed by many. ➤ Without an end to the claw back, there will be no benefit to the lowest-income families in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, Prince Edward Island, and the Territories. |
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VII. THE INAPPROPRIATENESS & INABILITY OF FOOD BANKS to ENSURE the RIGHT to FOOD

CAFB Position

- The existence & institutionalization of food banks in Canada is indicative of the failure of government to live up to its commitments and ensure the right to food.
- Solutions lie with federal & provincial government, not private charity.
- We urge the federal government to consult with affected communities & sectors, including food banks, in their pursuit of effective solutions to eradicate poverty & food insecurity.

2003 Update

- Apparently governments are not concerned about private charity – food banks – filling the policy gap.
 - Limited consultations or initiatives have been initiated by the federal government to address food insecurity in Canada with emergency food providers.
-

VIII. ENSHRINING the RIGHT to FOOD in DOMESTIC LAW

CAFB Position

- The federal government must enshrine the right to food in domestic law, consistent with its international commitments.
- The right to food cannot and should not be realized through expanded charitable or food relief programs, such as food banks or food stamp schemes.
- The right to food cannot be realized without realizing the right to an adequate standard of living & right to housing.

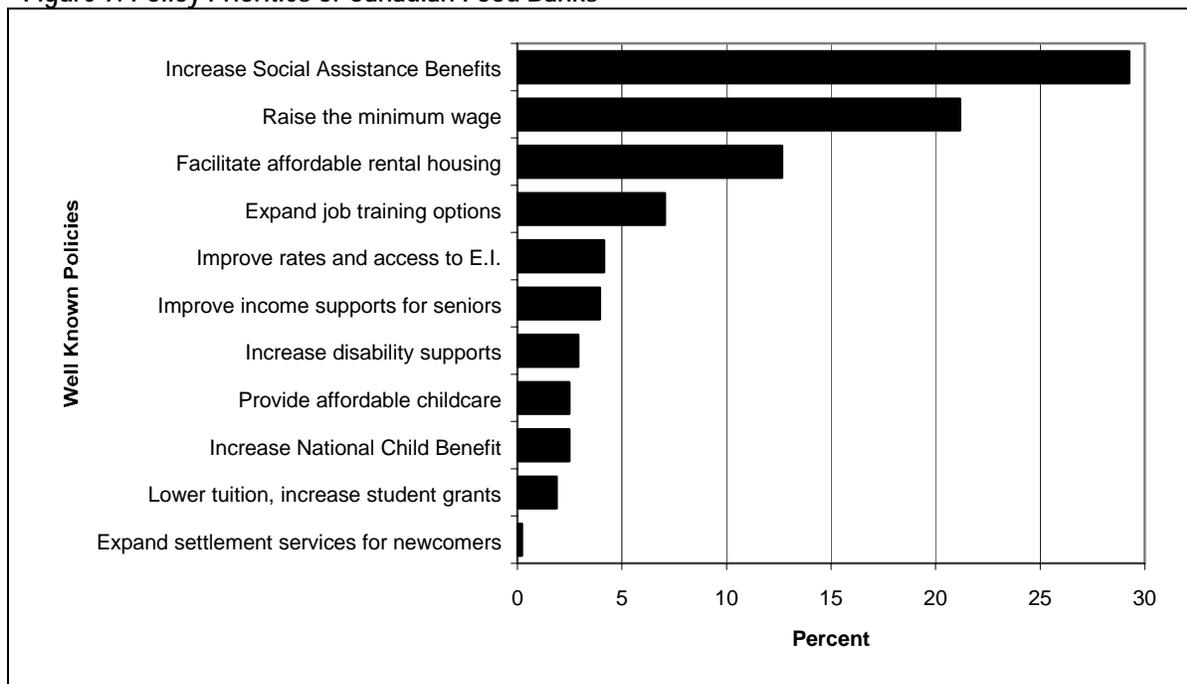
2003 Update

- The right to food is not recognized in domestic legislation.
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THE BASIS of CAFB PRIORITIES

The 2003 *HungerCount* survey asked respondents to identify the policy initiatives that they believe would have the greatest impact on hunger and poverty. Figure 9 highlights their priorities, based on the first-hand experiences of local food bank staff and volunteers across the country.

Figure 9: Policy Priorities of Canadian Food Banks



In addition to the priorities identified above, emergency food program operators also identified other factors contributing to the rising numbers of food recipients:

"Taxes need to be removed from essential goods and services, from milk to fuel."

"Aboriginal people need control over decision-making for programs and policies that affect their communities."

"Utility costs must be lowered – as prices rise dramatically, so does the number of people who must trade off paying bills for food."

"People with mental illness aren't getting the help they need."

"Addiction treatment and prevention programs need to be expanded."

"Single employable persons need better access to jobs. Enhanced training and education programs are needed."

"The rural economic base needs to be strengthened."

"Adult education opportunities need to be expanded – a key to a better life."

"Parents are now expected to pay additional costs for the schooling of young children, taking money out of the household food budget."

“University and college student loans and funds are exhausted by January – the cost of post-secondary education must come down.”

While the 2003 federal budget announcement took some steps in the right direction, there is clearly much room for improvement.

DISCUSSION

A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO FOOD SECURITY

Food security in Canada cannot be realized by food banks and emergency food programs alone. Without a corresponding investment in a wide range of programs by senior levels of government, particularly to address income security so that people may be able to purchase the food they need, the burden will continue to fall to the voluntary sector. Today, many social policy researchers are adopting the notion of “social inclusion” as a lens through which to examine, develop, and strengthen, responses to improve the quality of life for Canadians.^{xxix}

In the context of hunger and food insecurity, the domestic recognition of the right to food is essential for social inclusion. As the government itself recognized in *Canada’s Second Progress Report on Implementing the World Food Summit Plan of Action*, economic security – and the reduction of poverty – is, “an important element in the strategy for addressing food insecurity in both domestic and international actions, based on the notion that a key condition for food security is access to sufficient resources to purchase or grow food. Domestic actions centre on improving upon Canada’s social system, especially with respect to those programs that target our most vulnerable populations.”^{xxx}

The hundreds of thousands of people who go hungry each month in Canada experience social *exclusion* when their right to food, and other factors such as insufficient social supports and a lack of affordable housing, are not adequately addressed by all levels of government. While recent federal announcements indicate some recent willingness to address Canada’s social infrastructure (see the Policy Update), it is too early to tell if these small steps are enough to lead to a decrease in the demand being placed on emergency food providers across the country.

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

In more concrete terms, Canadians have a right to food. As we live in a society with an abundance of food that is grown, marketed, and bought, disproportionate to our needs, it is often forgotten that many are deprived of this right on a daily basis, solely due to a lack of income. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food defines the right to food as,

the right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety.^{xxxi}

It is impossible for emergency food providers to act as the vehicle for delivering and ensuring this right, as defined above. Food banks provide a stop-gap to prevent wider-spread hunger and malnutrition, but cannot possibly meet the criteria defined by the United Nations Special Rapporteur, nor do they want to. This is the responsibility of national governments – not voluntary, charitable organizations.

On paper, the federal government agrees. The list of international agreements that Canada has signed promising to eradicate hunger and poverty is extensive. These include the *Universal*

Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), and the *International Covenant on the Rights of the Child* (1989). Canada also recommitted to the *Rome Declaration on World Food Security* at the World Food Summit: Five Years Later, held in Rome in 2002, after its original 1996 commitment. By joining 181 other nations from around the world, Canada agreed to reducing the number of hungry people in the world by half by 2015, endorsed the concept of the “right to food” and the concept of food security.

Yet, it appears that the federal government is more willing to recognize hunger internationally than domestically, despite the endurance and depth of the problem at home. Since 1989, food bank use has increased by 105.8%, and there is no indication that the total number of people who are hungry, or at risk of hunger, has declined. Canada has yet to recognize the right to food with domestic legislation.

The weakening of Canada’s social infrastructure is apparent to the international community, as we continue a downward slide on the United Nations’ Human Development Index.^{xxxii} From first place in 1992 to 8th place today in terms of living conditions, the Index gives us pause to reflect on what “quality of life” in Canada means today. Emergency food providers recognize that without government intervention to counter this trend, the social exclusion of thousands of people will remain the norm.

AFFORDABILITY of ‘QUALITY OF LIFE’ IN CANADA

Earnings

Among the greatest concerns of food bank operators is the inability of food recipients to earn enough income to meet their food needs. Indeed, many Canadians live below the poverty line – 13% according to the Market Basket Measure. According to the National Council of Welfare, in 1999, 1,025,000 families and 1,677,000 singles continued to live in poverty – about 4.9 million individuals in total. They estimate it would take \$10.2 billion to make up the “poverty gap”.^{xxxiii}

Other studies have raised the alarm about growing income disparity in Canada. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives examined accumulated wealth using Statistics Canada’s Survey of Financial Security, and found deep inequalities. Among its key findings, the wealthiest 10% of families held 53% of all wealth in the country, and the wealthiest 50% of families controlled almost 95% of the wealth, leaving only 5% among the lowest 50% of families. The poorest 10% of families actually had more debts than assets – and their average wealth declined 28% between 1970 and 1999 to -\$10,700.^{xxxiv} The 2001 Census also revealed the growing income gap: that families at the bottom half of the income distribution made few gains, while the wealthiest 10% of families gained substantially.^{xxxv}

All of these findings are contributing to the case many Canadians are making for a “living wage” that would include going beyond minimum wages, fair wage policies and the unionization of many workers.^{xxxvi} Combined with other measures to bring families above the poverty line – increased access to Employment Insurance, social assistance, child care and affordable housing – a living wage could make a great contribution to raising the quality of life to the standard Canada is internationally-renowned for. In short, a living wage is not simply a “decent” income, but full access to resources that would facilitate the social and economic participation of all Canadians, for the achievement of social inclusion.

Food Spending

The food budget is one of the most flexible within a household, and often the first to be cut when basic needs compete to be met. The average Canadian spent almost 10% of his or her disposable income on food and non-alcoholic beverages in 1995.^{xxxvii} The more recent Survey of Household Spending revealed that in 2001, the average household spent 11% of its budget on food – about \$6,400 per year. However, among the lowest income 20% of households, 18% of the budget – or only \$2,700 – was spent on food that year.^{xxxviii}

The use of nutritious food baskets has become a viable tool to monitor the cost of a nutritious diet, and evaluate the progress of social and health policy – Health Canada’s National Nutritious Food Basket (1998), the Dieticians of Canada/Community Nutrition Council of BC (2001) and the City of Toronto Public Health department (2002) have developed some of the most-referenced.^{xxxix} As noted earlier, an estimated 10% of Canadians are unable to afford enough food or ate food of lesser quality due to insufficient income.^{xl}

Many organizations are concerned about the ability of low-income people to purchase a healthy diet. In British Columbia (BC), one survey found a 5% increase between 2000-2001 in food costs, without an equivalent rise in social assistance incomes. The BC food basket also determined that a four-person family would need \$626 per month to meet its nutritional requirements.^{xli} Toronto Public Health estimated this family would need approximately \$524 per month, and found a 3% rise in food costs from 2001-2002, and a 13% rise since 1999.^{xlii} For low-income families, it has become an increasing challenge to meet their dietary needs.

CHALLENGES for KEY POPULATION GROUPS

Discussions about “food insecurity” often distract from the stark fact that hundreds of thousands of people go hungry in Canada on a regular basis. The National Population Health Survey estimated that approximately 10% of Canadians either had compromised diets due to insufficient quality or quantity of food, or “worried” they would run out of food due to a lack of money.^{xliii} While anyone is at risk of food insecurity at some point in their lives, some groups are particularly vulnerable: children, single-parent families, “working poor”, students and seniors among them. The *HungerCount* survey also collects anecdotal evidence that Aboriginal people and some immigrant and/or refugee groups are also among those experiencing a disproportionate degree of food insecurity, and we urge the federal government to adopt initiatives to immediately reduce and eradicate poverty and hunger in these communities.

Children

Of all emergency food recipients each month, 39% or 306,552 are children under 18 years of age. Despite recent evidence that child poverty is decreasing in Canada, the number of hungry children has not. This is likely an underestimate of children at risk, as some families are able to rely on other sources, such as school-based meal programs for assistance. The life-long implications of depriving children of adequate nutrition are extensive and well-documented.^{xliv} Some impacts of food insecurity include susceptibility to illness, diminished attention spans and an inability to perform some tasks at school as well as other children.^{xlv}

As the on-going work of Campaign 2000 (the non-governmental organization established to encourage government to make its promise of eliminating child poverty a reality) reminds us, while some positive steps have been taken in recent months to advance early childhood education, increase the National Child Benefit and invest in affordable housing, there remains 1 in 6 children

living in economically insecure circumstances.^{xlvi} The federal government's primary vehicle for addressing child poverty is the National Child Benefit Supplement, yet the lowest income families – those receiving social assistance – remain deprived of the benefit in several provinces and territories. The impact is experienced by the entire family.

To fulfill Canada's commitment undertaken at the United Nations Special Session on Children in May 2002, Senator Landon Pearson's office is drafting Canada's National Plan of Action, as part of the National Children's Agenda. Due at the end of 2003, we strongly encourage that strategies for achieving economic security for families be recognized as a prerequisite for the well-being of children in Canada.^{xlvii}

Lone Parent Families

Single parent families comprised 33% of emergency food recipients in March 2003. Female-headed households are among the poorest in Canada – recent data shows that 52% are low-income.^{xlviii} Often, parents themselves go hungry so that their children are not deprived. Parents and children are both deprived of adequate nutrition. The claw-back of the National Child Benefit has also had a significant impact on the demand for emergency food assistance.^{xlix}

The “Working Poor”

Approximately 4.6% of all workers earned the minimum wage – and contrary to popular belief, the majority are not teenagers working part-time jobs (2000).¹ In many families with two parents working full-time, it is still not possible to close the poverty gap when earning the minimum wage. In the 2003 *HungerCount* survey, many emergency food providers emphasized the increasing numbers of people with jobs they were seeing – 13% of all recipients during the survey period. In addition, more noted that they were seeing an increase in employed and employable single men. Some attributed this increase to the difficulty many have in accessing Employment Insurance, having to resort to social assistance during times of job loss. Others emphasize that in most provinces, minimum wages fall far below any poverty line. The Caledon Institute found that in most cases, minimum wage earners fell far below Statistics Canada's “low-income cut-off”.ⁱⁱ

Post-Secondary Students

Campus-based food banks are opening across the country in response to the rapidly-rising costs of tuition and living expenses for students. The establishment of Meal Exchange, an umbrella organization representing many of these food banks, is a testament to the extent and depth of the problem. The *HungerCount* was able to contact many of the university and college-based programs and included their information here. Students made up 42.2% of all Canadian food bank users in March 2003, of 21 of participating campus-based food banks. At non-campus food banks, students were estimated to comprise 3.4% of all recipients.

The Ontario Federation of Students has found that the average undergraduate debt (nationally) is now \$21,000. Among the main contributing factors to student reliance on emergency food assistance: average tuition of more than \$4,000 per year, a lack of federal grant options, often-limited parental contributions, insufficient minimum wages, and decreased loan assistance.ⁱⁱⁱ The obvious implication of students graduating in debt? The likelihood of living in poverty for the long-term, despite the employment options that may await them.

Seniors

Many food banks also reported that in March 2003, 6.8% of recipients were senior citizens whose incomes were insufficient to support them through the month. While poverty among seniors did experience a dramatic decline from 34% in 1980 to 18% in 1999, it worsened for single senior

women, to almost 49% in the same period.^{liii} The overall decrease is attributed to the introduction of Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), on top of the Canada Pension Plan and Quebec Pension Plan. Nonetheless, a recent investigation found that thousands of senior citizens are due millions of dollars in federal GIS benefits, but remain unaware of their entitlement.^{liv} Particularly for many seniors living with disabilities, or in regions where housing and utility costs are rising, access to the supplement is crucial.

MAKING a HUNGER-FREE CANADA a REALITY

What will it take to eliminate hunger in Canada? Certainly, Canada's food banks will continue to do their part to meet the immediate needs of hungry people. However, food banks are the first to say that they are not in the position to deliver the right to food, and without substantive policy changes that address *economic* security, the reliance on their services will not be decreased or eliminated in the foreseeable future. Current and past *HungerCount* reports outline the public policy initiatives that must be prioritized by each level of government to actualize the right to food in Canada. The challenge is immense and complex: solutions to poverty, hunger and food insecurity do not neatly align themselves within a narrow policy arena, a sole piece of legislation, one level of government or fall within a limited geography. Nonetheless, the research has been done – it is time for long-overdue action.

As a result, CAFB's Plan of Action includes a strong commitment to increasing awareness and working for change. CAFB will continue to:

- Conduct, maintain and promote the results of the *HungerCount* survey
- Meet with politicians and staff at all levels of government to contribute to public policy solutions
- Engage in non-partisan action campaigns to encourage our members and the public to take action
- Develop media relations and public education tools to increase the visibility of public policy issues related to hunger
- Cultivate relationships and work together for systemic change with coalition partnerships.

With a federal election on the horizon, we encourage you to join us in making hunger a visible issue. Ask your representatives to articulate their positions and plans for making a difference (See Appendix 3: Action Tools for contacts). Emergency food programs are not the answer: a food drive-weary public can no longer fill the void. To benefit all Canadians, *something has to give*.

GLOSSARY of *HUNGERCOUNT* TERMINOLOGY

Food Bank: A central warehouse or clearing house, registered as a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing, and distributing food, free of charge, directly or through front line agencies which may also provide meals to the hungry. Food banks may also coordinate advocacy, public education, and employment programs, as part of the effort to eliminate hunger.

Affiliated Agency: An organization that regularly receives a supply of groceries from a central food bank for distribution to the public.

Grocery Program: The distribution of groceries from food banks to the public. Food “hampers” or bags of groceries are provided with enough food for no more than several days.

Meal Program: The distribution of prepared meals to the public. May be operated by a food bank, or another agency, such as a soup kitchen, hostel or shelter.

Food Security: 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.

Food Insecurity: The inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet of quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.

Right to Food: The right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety.

Social Inclusion: Social inclusion is a concept being widely used to develop and strengthen social policy frameworks, in Canada and Europe. In the context of hunger and food insecurity, obvious consequences of social *exclusion*, the right to food must be recognized and met in order for social inclusion to be fully realized.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES: Hunger, Food Insecurity & Poverty in Canada

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- 7th Generation Initiative (2003). *Canada Well-Being Measurement Act*. House of Commons, Motion M-385.
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INTERNET LINKS

Hunger and Food Insecurity (Canada):

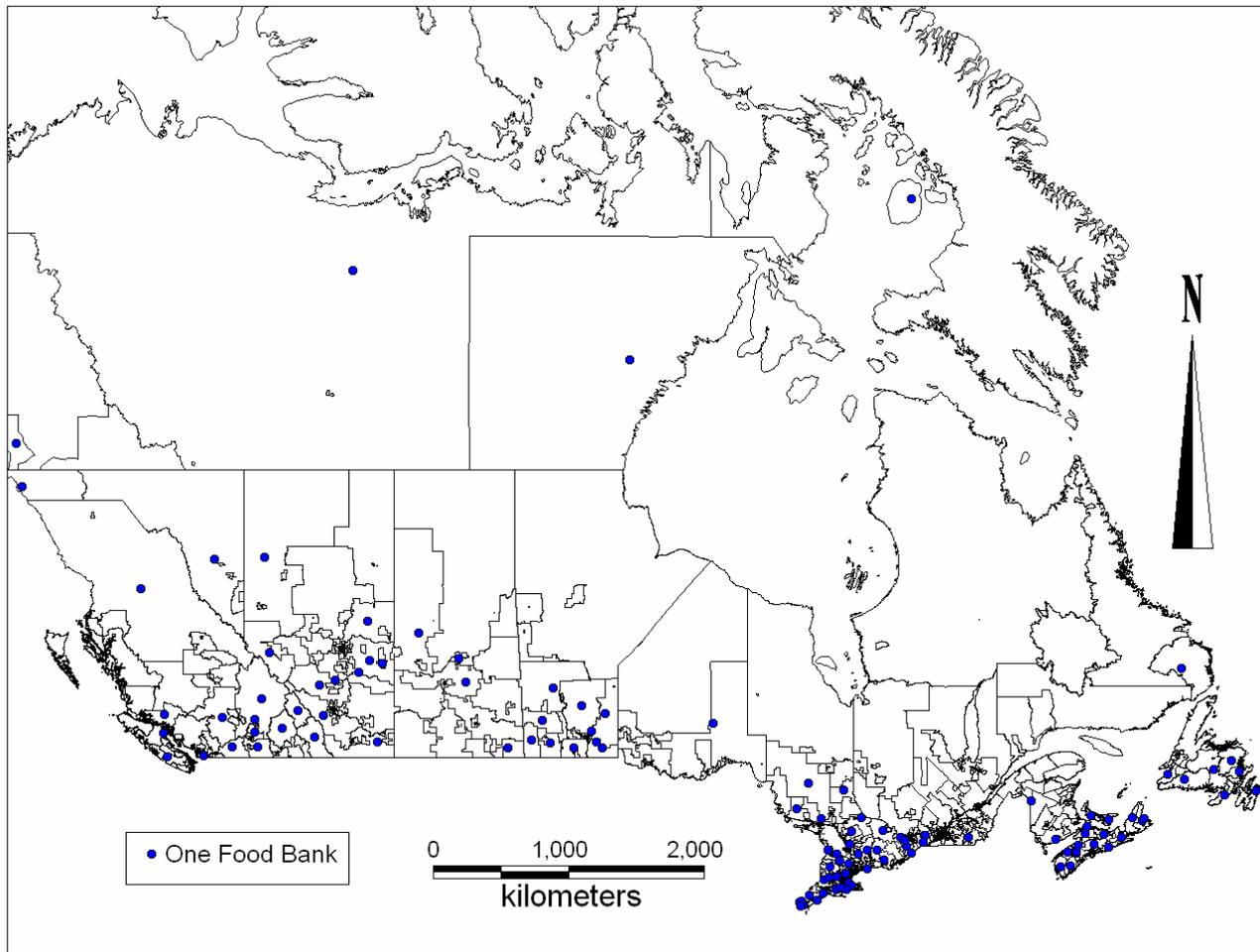
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Food Security Bureau: www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fsb/FSB2eng.html
- Caledon Institute for Social Policy: www.caledoninst.ca
- Campaign 2000: www.campaign2000.ca
- Canadian Association of Food Banks: www.cafb-acba.ca
- Canadian Council on Social Development: www.ccsd.ca
- Canadian Food Security Network: www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/fd.htm
- Canadian Labour Congress: www.clc-ctc.ca
- Canadian Policy Research Networks: www.cprn.com
- Canadian Social Research Links: www.canadiansocialresearch.net
- Citizens for Public Justice: www.cpj.ca
- Council of Canadians: www.canadians.org
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities: www.fcm.ca
- Mazon Canada: www.mazoncanada.ca
- Meal Exchange: www.mealexchange.com
- National Anti-Poverty Organization: www.napo-onap.ca
- National Children's Alliance: www.nationalchildrensalliance.com
- National Council of Welfare: www.ncwcnbes.net
- PovertyNet: www.povnet.org
- Statistics Canada Community Profiles: www.statcan.ca/start.html
- Tristat Resources: www.shillington.ca

Hunger and Food Insecurity (International)

- America's Second Harvest: www.secondharvest.org
- Canadian Foodgrains Bank: www.foodgrainsbank.ca
- Centre on Hunger and Poverty: www.centreonhunger.org
- Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu>
- FIAN: www.fian.org
- Food First: www.foodfirst.org
- Food Research and Action Center: www.frac.org
- Hunger Free America: www.hungerfreeamerica.com
- Sustain (U.K.): http://www.sustainweb.org/poverty_index.asp
- United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization: www.fao.org

APPENDIX 1: Map

Map 1: Food Banks in Canada's Rural Areas (<100,000 people)



APPENDIX 2: Table 3 - Provincial Breakdown of Selected 2003 *HungerCount* Results

2003 Item	Canada	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NF
Total Volunteer Hours	467,749	50,949	29,791	8,348	28,032	74,581	251,826	12,550	5,569	934	4,851
Total Staff Hours	431,696	12,063	14,308	2,977	3,187	27,131	360,604	7,327	1,126	868	2,080
Family & Household Composition – Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted in grocery programs)											
Sole-Parent	29.6	28.4	25.3	25.6	32.2	29.2	30.6	24.5	26.9	26.9	36.1
Single	31.4	42.2	25.8	34.2	37.8	30.3	30.2	33.7	30.6	20.4	22.2
Couples No Children	8.6	7.6	14.8	7.6	1.1	9.6	7.3	14.6	15.6	13.7	10.8
Two-Parent	20.2	13.5	22.5	18.3	27.1	22.6	18.6	20.9	19.7	24.1	23.0
Students	3.4	2.5	5.6	6.6	1.2	3.1	4.0	1.6	1.0	3.6	2.3
Seniors	6.8	5.7	5.9	7.7	0.6	5.3	9.4	4.7	6.2	11.4	5.5
Income Sources – Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted in grocery programs)											
Social Assistance	57.0	78.6	45.5	86.3	71.1	62.0	72.0	82.8	75.4	55.1	92.3
Employment	13.0	8.6	34.2	4.7	15.1	20.6	15.4	8.2	9.0	23.7	0.9
Employment Insurance	4.0	1.7	2.5	0.9	2.1	1.4	2.6	2.8	2.7	13.4	1.8
Disability Support	8.0	4.4	4.9	0.7	0.5	8.0	1.1	1.6	4.4	3.1	1.3
Pension Income	6.0	2.1	2.4	1.8	4.5	2.6	3.3	2.5	3.7	2.9	3.2
Student Loans	2.0	0.5	1.9	2.7	1.1	0.5	1.1	0.1	0.6	0.6	0.2
Other	4.0	1.8	2.6	0.6	1.6	2.1	1.8	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.1
No Income	6.0	2.2	6.0	2.3	4.1	2.8	2.8	1.3	3.8	1.0	0.1
Amount of Food in a Hamper – Percentage of Food Banks											
1 - 2.5 days	12.2	20.9	2.0	21.4	23.3	8.6	0.0	4.0	11.1	0.0	31.0
3 - 4.5 days	44.2	52.3	32.7	35.7	50.0	51.7	20.0	64.0	36.1	100.0	51.7
5 - 6.5 days	13.3	15.1	10.2	7.1	6.7	15.2	60.0	12.0	25.0	0.0	6.9
7 - 9.5 days	13.3	10.5	30.6	14.3	16.7	12.6	20.0	16.0	11.1	0.0	10.3
10+ days	8.7	1.2	24.5	21.4	3.3	11.9	0.0	4.0	16.7	0.0	0.0
Frequency of Food Bank Use Allowed – Percentage of Food Banks											
One per week or more	8.0	13.6	1.9	7.1	15.6	4.9	30.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1 – 2 times/month	74.0	69.3	55.8	64.3	71.9	75.3	61.5	96.2	92.5	100.0	86.7
6 – 8 times/year	6.0	10.2	25.0	7.1	6.3	6.2	0.0	3.8	7.5	0.0	10.0
3 – 4 times/year	7.0	5.7	15.4	14.3	3.1	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3
1 – 2 times/year	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Emergency & Need	1.0	1.1	1.9	7.1	3.1	9.3	7.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Measures Taken due to Lack of Food – Percentage of Food Banks											
1+ measures taken	53.1	52.3	66.7	64.3	42.4	44.9	64.3	48.2	60.5	100.0	63.3
Close early/do not open	2.7	4.7	5.7	0.0	0.0	1.3	7.1	3.7	2.4	16.7	3.3
Buy food	42.5	40.2	61.5	35.7	26.7	35.0	35.7	48.1	63.4	100.0	58.6
Give less food	20.7	20.9	28.8	35.7	22.6	17.4	57.1	18.5	12.5	50.0	17.2
Other	15.6	14.9	9.1	2.1	5.6	29.5	2.7	5.0	8.3	1.0	5.4
Average # of measures	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	1

ACTION TOOLS:

Some Steps You Can Take to Help Eliminate Hunger & Food Insecurity

1. GET ELECTION-READY:

CALL, WRITE OR MEET YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATE

Federal Elections are expected in 2004: Bring the *HungerCount* to your local candidate for Member of Parliament (MP) & ask them what they will do to eliminate hunger and poverty in Canada. Let them know your vote depends on their answers!

To help you find and contact your local candidate:

- Elections Canada: www.elections.ca or telephone: 1-800-463-6868
- Parliament of Canada postal code or name search of MP's: www.parl.gc.ca

You can also contact the political parties directly:

- Liberal Party of Canada: www.liberal.ca
- New Democratic Party of Canada: www.ndp.ca
- The Progressive Conservative Party of Canada: www.pcparty.ca
- Bloc Québécois: www.blocquebécois.org
- Canadian Alliance Party: www.canadianalliance.ca

For a complete directory of Canadian political parties visit:

<http://home.ican.net/~alexng/can.html>

3. VOLUNTEER YOUR TALENTS!

For more information about what you can do, call The Canadian Association of Food Banks at (416) 203-9241 or e-mail us at info@cafb-acba.ca. We are always looking for volunteers, or we can put you in touch with emergency food providers in your area.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Che, J. and J. Chen (2001). *Food Insecurity in Canadian Households*. Health Reports 12(4): 19.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid, 13.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The United Nations convened the World Food Summit in 1996 with the intention to renew the commitment of world leaders to the eradication of hunger and malnutrition through the realization of global food security.
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- ^{vi} Government of Canada (2003). 2001 Census of Canada. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- ^{vii} Campaign 2000 (November 2002). Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada, 1.
- ^{viii} 2001 Census.
- ^{ix} See Lawn, Judith (1998). *National Nutritious Food Basket*. Ottawa: Health Canada.
- ^x Government of Canada. *Understanding the 2000 Low Income Statistics*, 21.
- ^{xi} Klein, Seth and Andrea Long (June 2003). *A Bad Time to be Poor: An Analysis of British Columbia's Welfare Policies*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: BC Office, 8.
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- ^{xiii} Dieticians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC (October 2002). *The Cost of Eating in BC*, 11.
- ^{xiv} Government of Canada. *Understanding the 2000 Low Income Statistics*, 20.
- ^{xv} Ibid, 19.
- ^{xvi} Ibid, 18.
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- ^{xviii} See Oliphant, Michael and Chris Slosser (2003). *The Ontario Alternative Budget 2003: Targeting the Most Vulnerable – A Decade of Desperation for Ontario's Welfare Recipients*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
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- ^{xx} See Noel, Alain (December 2002). *A Law Against Poverty: Quebec's New Approach to Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Canadian Policy Research Networks.
- ^{xxi} Government of Canada, *Understanding the 2000 Low Income Statistics*, 15.
- ^{xxii} Ibid, 14.
- ^{xxiii} Ibid, 13.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid, 12.
- ^{xxv} See Federation of Canadian Municipalities (May 2001). *Joint FCM/CAMA Task Force On The Future Role Of Municipal Government*. Adopted at FCM Annual Conference.
- ^{xxvi} Government of Canada, *Understanding the 2000 Low Income Statistics*, Appendix G.
- ^{xxvii} Toronto Food Policy Council, *Introducing the Toronto Food Policy Council: Who We Are, What We Do And How Do It*. City of Toronto, 44.
- ^{xxviii} Government of Canada, *Understanding the 2000 Low Income Statistics*, Appendix G.
- ^{xxix} Levitas, Ruth (2003). *The Idea of Social Inclusion*. Canadian Council on Social Development, Conference Presentation: www.ccsd.ca.
- ^{xxx} See Government of Canada (2002). *Canada's Second Progress Report on Implementing the World Food Summit Plan of Action*. Ottawa: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.
- ^{xxxi} See United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. *What is the Right to Food?* United Nations: www.righttofood.org.
- ^{xxxii} See United Nations (2003). *Human Development Index*.
- ^{xxxiii} National Council of Welfare (2003). *Poverty Profiles 1999*. Ottawa, 5.
- ^{xxxiv} See Kelstetter, Steven (2002). *Rags and Riches: Wealth Inequality in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- ^{xxxv} Government of Canada (2003). *2001 Census of Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, May 13th release.
- ^{xxxvi} See Schenk, Christopher (November 2001). *From Poverty Wages to a Living Wage*. Toronto: The CSJ Foundation and the Ontario Federation of Labour.

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- ^{xxxvii} Marcotte, Michelle, et al. (1999). *Canadian Consumer Food Buying Trends*. Ottawa: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Government of Canada, 1.
- ^{xxxviii} Government of Canada (2002). *Household Spending 2001*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Dec. 11 release, 1-3.
- ^{xxxix} See Lawn, Judith (1998). *National Nutritious Food Basket*. Ottawa: Health Canada; Dieticians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC (October 2002). *The Cost of Eating in BC*; and the City of Toronto (2002). *The Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto 2002*. Toronto Public Health.
- ^{xl} Che, J and J. Chen (2001).
- ^{xli} Dieticians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC (October 2002). *The Cost of Eating in BC*, 5.
- ^{xlii} City of Toronto (2002). *The Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto 2002*. Toronto Public Health, 2.
- ^{xliii} Che, J. and J. Chen.
- ^{xliv} See Canadian Association of Food Banks (October 2002). *HungerCount 2002: Eating Their Words – Government Failure on Food Security*. Toronto, 15-16.
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- ^{xlvi} Campaign 2000, 1.
- ^{xlvi} See Government of Canada (July 2003). *A World Fit for Children: Canada's Plan of Action (Draft Outline)*. Office of the Honourable Senator Landon Pearson.
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- ^{xliv} See McIntyre, Lynn, et al. (2002). *Food Insecurity of Low-Income Lone Mothers and their Children in Atlantic Canada*. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96(6): 411-415.
- ^l Battle, Ken (2003). *Minimum Wages in Canada: A Statistical Portrait with Policy Implications*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute for Social Policy, 278-279.
- ^{li} Ibid, 273.
- ^{lii} Ontario Federation of Students (2003). *Information Fact Sheets*. Toronto.
- ^{liii} National Council of Welfare (2003). *Poverty Profiles 1999*. Ottawa, 7.
- ^{liv} See Shillington, Richard (June 2002). *Community Undertaking Social Policy Project: Final Report*. Tristat Resources and St. Christopher House (Toronto).
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