

## Green Paper – Food

- **Poor families spend a significantly higher proportion of their incomes on food than rich families**
- **Poor diet is a direct cause of several major illnesses and a contributory factor to many others**
- **A poor diet is significantly cheaper than a good diet**
- **People in remote and rural areas have poorer access to healthy foods than those in urban areas**
- **Food insecurity has a significant impact on women's mental health**

People who can't make ends meet on their available income must make choices on what spending they reduce or discontinue. Where people are living in poverty, their choices will often involve buying cheaper food.

Diet is a key factor underlying a range of conditions including:

- Nutritional deficiencies
- Many forms of cancer
- Diabetes mellitus
- Cardiovascular diseases

And also plays a significant role in:

- Oral diseases
- Respiratory infections
- Digestive diseases
- Congenital abnormalities

(Robertson et al 2006)

Food costs present a particular challenge for poorer people. While those in the richest decile commit about 7% of their incomes to food, those in the second poorest decile have to commit 17% of income to food. Those in the poorest decile commit slightly less of their income to food (15%). This is likely to reflect the very real challenges people on low incomes face in having insufficient income to pay for all their necessary spending – rent or mortgage, utility bills, heating, children's clothes, food – and is likely to indicate real deficiencies in the amount and/or quality of food being bought. (The Scottish Government, 2009)

There are various ways in which people can reduce their food costs:

- They can buy cheaper brands
- They can buy cheaper types of food
- They can stop buying more expensive foods
- They can buy food more locally, saving on transport costs

- They can buy foods with longer shelf-lives so that they are less concerned about food becoming unusable before it can be eaten

Mass-produced food designed to be cheap and filling often carries high fat, salt and sugar contents. High fat and sugar foods are strongly linked to obesity while high salt food is associated with raised blood pressure. Fresh fruit and vegetables, on the other hand, are a relatively expensive way of avoiding hunger. (Robertson et al 2006)

Fresh fruit and vegetables are also more likely to have shorter shelf-lives.

Remote and rural communities face additional challenges due to lack of choice between food retail outlets, higher prices, and the lower range of stock carried in small local food shops.

A study carried out for the Foods Standard Agency between 2005 and 2007 found a very clear difference in the price of the Healthy Eating Indicator Shopping Basket (HEISB) between small general stores of the sort normally found in remote and rural communities on one hand and medium and larger shops typical of urban settings on the other. (Dawson et al 2008).

However, there is a process leading up to decision about what food can be bought and in most households this falls mainly to women.

Food insecurity is described as “whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain”

A recent Canadian study identified high rates of food insecurity particularly amongst female lone parent families. Previous research had shown links between food insecurity and physical and mental conditions including heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, stress, anxiety, irritability, social isolation, heightened emotional responsiveness, eating disorders and depression and that, even when mothers limited their own food intake to ensure their children had enough to eat, children’s mental and physical health was still affected through lower levels of positive parent-child interactions, poorer infant feeding practices, less competent parenting practices and increasing strain and irritability in parent-child interactions. (Collins 2010)

## **References:**

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