



Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture

Media Release

The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture launches its Food Miles Project.

Truro, August 7, 2007 - The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture will launch its Food Miles Project, tomorrow, **Wednesday, August 8th at 10 am at Noggins Corner Farm Market in Greenwich, NS.**

The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) and the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) are collaborating to find answers to common questions about our food supply. What distance does our food actually travel before we consume it and at what cost? What portion of our food dollar actually supports the local economy? What are the social, economic, and environmental impacts of consuming a diet consisting of increasing amounts of imported food? How can a more local diet help improve the sustainability of rural Nova Scotia?

Are we eating an increasing diet of foods imported from all over the world? Preliminary estimates show that only about 8.4% of our diet may be produced locally on Nova Scotian farms. Fifteen years ago it was closer to 15%. (see background information attached) This project will examine the issues around these and other questions related to the food we consume - where our food comes from and at what cost.

Frazer Hunter, President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture says: “When things are cheap people tend not to question them. That has been the case with our food supply for a long time now. With a food system that is largely based on cheap fossil fuels coupled with changing public opinion and attitudes about food safety and quality and the environmental sustainability of agriculture; people are increasingly questioning where their food comes from”.

“People are starting to show an increasing interest in locally produced food; not only because it could benefit Nova Scotia’s rural communities, but because we have such a diversity of fantastic foods grown right here,” says Jennifer Scott of the Ecology Action Centre. According to Marla MacLeod, Food Miles Project coordinator, “we get a lot of good questions about the food supply that are difficult to answer without a proper research program”.

In addition to gathering information about what we eat and where it comes from, the project will examine ways to make buying local food easier through the development of toolkits for institutions, organizations,

restaurants and catering companies to assist with overcoming barriers to purchasing local food. The project will also work with both public and private institutions and organizations to encourage local, sustainable food procurement policies.

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For additional information see attached project background paper or contact:

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The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture represents the interests of 2500 farm families in Nova Scotia. Founded in 1896 to provide Nova Scotia's farm community with a single voice, the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture is the province's only general farm organization.

The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is Nova Scotia's largest and most active environmental organization. Since 1971, the EAC has been working to build a healthier and more sustainable Nova Scotia. Today the EAC has over 1500 members, 250 volunteers and staff, seven active committees.

Food Miles Project Background Information

Reduced Food Miles Brings Benefits

Are we eating too many foods imported from all over the world? Preliminary estimates show that only about 8.4% of our diet is produced on NS farms. Fifteen years ago it was closer to 15%.

‘Food miles’ are the distance a food item travels from farm to plate. As the distance between our food producers and consumers increases, so can greenhouse gas emissions, rural unemployment, and food insecurity.

Consumers spend less for their food than ever before, while at the same time primary producers continue to get a smaller and smaller share of the food dollar. For some time farm organizations have been arguing that promoting the consumption of local food is one way the primary producer can capture a greater share of the consumer’s food dollar. The arguments have been couched in terms of strengthening the local economy by keeping dollars in the community, enhancing the ability of producer reinvestment in the community – generally that buying local is good for the local economy, good for family farms, good for the environment and good for the health of Nova Scotians; however, these arguments have been primarily based on anecdotal evidence.

For example: We know that high end food products are exported and replaced by imported product, but, we don’t know the extent. We suspect that up to 90% of the food Nova Scotians consume may be brought into the province primarily by road transport; however, we don’t know the exact amounts. We suspect that importing an increasingly high percentage of the food we consume has social, environmental and economic costs that impact, not only on farm businesses and the province’s agricultural economy, but on all Nova Scotians as well.

We believe that a move from traditional commodity markets to selling a product that consumers can identify with is a critical part of the industry’s survival in the future. We also believe that consumer attitudes are changing with respect to their food choices. Growing concerns regarding food safety and quality, nutrition and environmental sustainability, are increasingly pushing consumers toward local food. This project is a key part of the Federation’s response to the changes noted above. The information generated by this project will provide the farm community with the tools it needs to influence consumer purchasing patterns and promote policy initiatives that will support local production and processing, followed by consumption.

Project Objectives

Generally the goal of the project is to define the concept of ‘food miles’ and operationalize the concept in a Nova Scotia context. Specific objectives related to that goal include:

- Development of an annotated data base of related initiatives in other jurisdictions;

- Develop information related to the origin of food consumed in Nova Scotia;
- Develop information related to energy consumption related to imported food;
- Research the economic, social and environmental impacts of importing food;
- Research the barriers related to getting more local food in grocery stores, restaurants, and public institutions;
- The development and testing of educational materials related to the promotion of increased consumption of local food;
- Communication of research results to the general public, and;
- Development and advocacy of related policy initiatives.

Project Activities include answering the following questions

- What is the state of knowledge on Food Miles? Conduct a literature review. What are other jurisdictions doing to promote local food? Research existing education programs and policies.
- What percentage of food consumed in NS is locally produced?
- What percentage of food consumed in NS is imported?
- Imported food: how far does it travel on average?
- Sample meals: Compare the distances traveled by foods in meals from locally-produced foods vs. ‘typical’ meals)
- What is the energy consumption related to Food Miles?
- What are the social impacts of imported food?
- What are the economic impacts of imported food?
- What are the environmental impacts of imported food?
- Examine the barriers to getting local food onto grocery store shelves, into restaurants, and into institutions.

Food dollars leaving province...

Preliminary estimates show that over time, a smaller share of our food dollars are finding their way back to Nova Scotia farms.

NS Farm cash receipts/Food spending¹						
	Farm cash receipts (\$)	Exports (\$)	Farm cash receipts from NS sales (\$)	Amount Nova Scotians spend on food (\$)	Share of food spending that goes to domestic farm cash receipts	
1991	309,225,000	62,407,000	246,818,000	1,705,223,585	0.1447	14.50%
1996	367,046,000	120,133,028	246,912,972	1,927,902,184	0.1281	12.80%
2001	402,363,000	154,457,107	247,905,893	2,048,940,468	0.1210	12.10%
2006	437,956,000	244,678,332	193,277,668	2,301,799,113	0.0840	8.4%
ref	1	2	3	4	5	6

% of imported foods increasing

In Canada, imports of food as a percentage of net supply are going up. For instance, between 1964 and 2001, imports of fruits (and fruit products) have gone from 67% to 97% of supply. Imports of vegetables (and vegetable products) have gone from 20% to 48% in the same time period. While dairy products, poultry, and eggs have remained relatively stable, imports of red meat have risen from 4.2% in 1964 to 24% in 2002 (ref 7).

References:

1. Statistics Canada. Agriculture Economic Statistics. Cat. No. 21-011. Payments are subtracted from Farm Cash Receipts
2. Strategis http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_mrkti/tdst/engdoc/tr_homep.html used total exports from NS, NAICS codes: 111, 112, 1151, 1152, 3111, 3112, 3113, 3114, 3115, 3116, 312. More time is required to refine this figure to exclude non-food items, and include intraprovincial trade.
3. Farm cash receipts – Exports
4. Statistics Canada. Food Consumption in Canada, Part I 2002. Cat. No. 32-229. The amount spent on food is derived by multiplying total annual food expenditure per person by the population of Nova Scotia (Statistics Canada CANSIM table 051-00005). Food spending for 2006 is estimated, based on 2005 figures from Statistics Canada catalogue 62-202.
5. Farm cash receipts divided by the amount Nova Scotians spend on food.
6. Multiplied by 100 to get a percentage.
7. Statistics Canada. Food Consumption in Canada Cat. No. 32-229. Appendix C.

¹ In current dollars