



HUNGERCOUNT2009

A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada, with recommendations for change



About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is the national charitable organization representing and supporting the food bank community across Canada. Our members and their respective agencies serve approximately 85% of people accessing emergency food programs nationwide. Our mission is to meet the short-term need for food, and to find long-term solutions to hunger. Please visit www.foodbankscanada.ca for more information.



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794,738 Canadians



walked into a food bank looking for help during the month of March 2009 – an increase of 18% over March 2008. This is too many by any measure. Too many Canadians are struggling, and this is unacceptable in a wealthy country such as ours. It is time to take action to create a new reality.

Executive Summary



In the month of March 2009, 794,738 people were assisted by a food bank in Canada. This is an 18% increase compared to the same period in 2008 – the largest year-over-year increase on record.

The need for food banks has grown across the country. Alberta (61% increase), Nova Scotia (20% increase) and Ontario (19% increase) have been hit the hardest, and no region has gone unscathed. Even Saskatchewan and Manitoba, two provinces that escaped the worst effects of the recession, saw increases in food bank use of 6% and 18%, respectively.

Because of the recession, many Canadians stepped through the front door of a food bank this year for the first time. In the month of March alone, it was a new and unwelcome experience for 9.1% of those helped – more than 72,000 people – across the country.

Through a period of upheaval, one thing has not changed inside Canada's food banks: the need for food assistance exists across the social spectrum. Thirty-seven percent of those helped are children, and half of assisted households are families with children. Though the majority of households turning to food banks count pensions, disability-related income supports, and social assistance as their primary source of income, one-fifth are in the labour force and still unable to make ends meet.

A changing economic reality

The recession has brought wider attention to a number of underlying problems in the Canadian economy. Those who have been knocked out of

work in the past year are facing a job market that has changed drastically over the last decade and a half. Well-paying jobs in the manufacturing and forestry sectors are becoming more scarce, replaced by those in other sectors – particularly retail and accommodation/food services – that pay significantly less and offer few extra-wage benefits such as dental, prescription drug, and pension coverage.

For Canada's unemployed, and for those unable to work, the situation is no better. A large percentage of those assisted by food banks are forced to ask for help because their pension, disability-related income supports, or social assistance benefits provide too little to afford even the bare essentials.

In the past three decades, the majority of Canadians have seen their incomes stagnate or decline,¹ and we can expect more of the same in the coming years. Based on knowledge gained from recessions in 1981-82 and 1990-91, it is likely that the current period of job losses is not over.² For the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have already lost their jobs, there will be a difficult struggle to climb back to pre-recession income levels.³

Canadian federal and provincial governments have done a great deal to counter the effects of the recession. As they turn their focus to the years ahead, and to what it will take to get industries back to

794,738

people turned to food banks in March 2009

18%

increase from 2008 to 2009

37%

of those assisted are children

health and Canadians back to work, it is crucial that the realities of those most vulnerable to hunger and low income are incorporated into larger economic plans. We must take this opportunity to address the fact that too many Canadians have faced hunger for too long.

We can reduce hunger in Canada

We all – individuals, the non-profit sector, business, governments at all levels – have a role to play in reducing hunger and enabling economic inclusion in Canada. The Discussion and Policy section of this report lays out a number of ways that different sectors of society can become involved. In the larger picture, governments have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that all Canadians are able to take advantage of the nation's economic wealth and potential. With specific reference to the federal government, Food Banks Canada recommends the following:

- 1 Maintain planned levels of federal transfers, including the Canadian Social Transfer, to provincial, territorial, and First Nations governments.
- 2 Implement a federal poverty prevention and reduction strategy, with measureable targets and timelines.

3 Ensure that post-recession economic development takes account of the needs of low-income Canadians. Only by accounting for those most vulnerable to hunger and poverty from the beginning can we arrive at an improved, inclusive social and economic reality.

4 Continue to work to make the Employment Insurance system more fair and inclusive, through changes to qualifying hours, benefit levels, and benefit length.

5 Increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit to a maximum of \$5,000 per child, per year (up from about \$3,300), to help ensure that parents are adequately supported in raising their children.

6 Invest in a system of good-quality, affordable, accessible child care – an absolute necessity for the economic health of families, and for healthy child development.

7 Continue to increase uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) among low-income seniors. There remains a small but significant number of seniors who face hunger and poverty. Attention to GIS uptake would go a long way towards addressing this issue.

8 Increase Guaranteed Income Supplement benefit levels. Though Old Age Security (OAS) and the GIS bring the majority of low-income seniors above the after-tax low income cut-off, the maximum annual benefit of about \$14,000 is still quite meagre.

9 Invest in the improvement of housing in rural areas by (a) increasing federal funding for housing repair and improvement in rural areas, and (b) initiating a review of rural housing programs to ensure they are effectively meeting objectives.

10 Continue to invest in affordable housing in Canada's urban areas.

For too long, supports to vulnerable Canadians have been interpreted by Canadian governments as simple expenditures, and the dominant concern has been, "How much will it cost?" A more accurate, healthy, and hopeful interpretation is to understand these supports as investments with long-term returns. The findings of *HungerCount 2009* provide a compelling answer to a slightly different question: "How much is the status quo costing us?"

SECTION 1: RESULTS

Food bank use during the recession



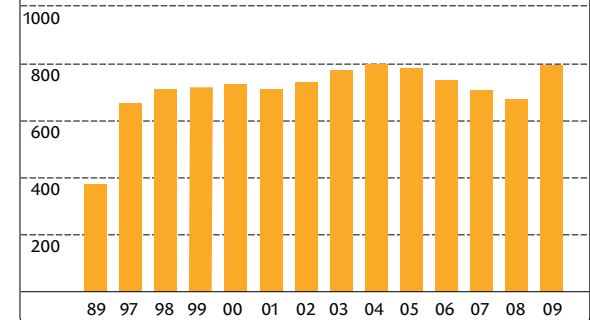
This year's *HungerCount* survey confirms what we all suspected: food bank use across the country has escalated as a result of the economic downturn. More than 790,000 people walked into a food bank in March 2009, 72,000 of them for the first time. Not surprisingly, food banks themselves, running on shoestring budgets and staffed largely by dedicated volunteers, are struggling to meet the demand. This year's *HungerCount* portrays a country in need of change.

Food bank use is rising across the country

In March 2009, 794,738 separate individuals were assisted by a food bank or affiliated food program in Canada. This is an increase of 18% compared to the same period in 2008, and is the largest year-over-year increase on record.

In 2009, food bank use has nearly reached the record levels experienced in 2004, and is 10% higher than 10 years ago. **Figure 1** provides information on the number of individuals assisted by food banks and affiliated food programs⁴ for each year national *HungerCount* data is available. This year's findings reveal an abrupt reversal of the gradual downward trend we had been observing since 2004.

FIGURE 1: Number of people assisted by food banks in Canada: 1989-2009 (March of each year, in thousands)



18% increase in food bank use in 2009

Compared to the same period in 2008, three quarters of Canadian food banks experienced an increase in the number of people they assisted in March of this year. When the figures are considered by region, nine provinces saw increases, and seven of those experienced double-digit rises. Worst hit were Alberta (+61%), Nova Scotia (+20%), Ontario (+19%), Manitoba (+18%), British Columbia (+15%), and New Brunswick (+14%).

The bulk of the national increase was concentrated in the three provinces most weakened by the

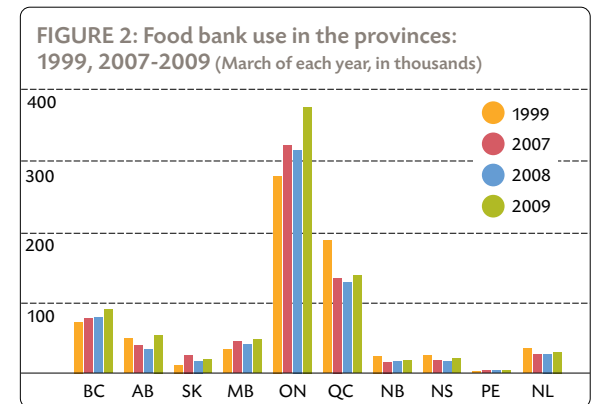
When considered as a share of the national total, food banks in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia accounted for 76% of food bank use in Canada this year – down slightly from 78% in 2008. Food bank use in Alberta and Manitoba increased as a share of the national total, with a notable jump in Alberta from 4.8% of the total in 2008 to 6.8% in 2009.

Measured as a percentage of the national population, the number of individuals assisted by food banks increased to 2.4%, up from 2.1% in 2008. Nine of ten provinces saw an increase in use as a percentage of their respective provincial populations. As in past years, Newfoundland & Labrador (5.9% of provincial population), Manitoba (4%), and Ontario (2.9%) assisted the highest proportion of provincial residents.⁵

7 provinces saw double-digit increases in food bank use

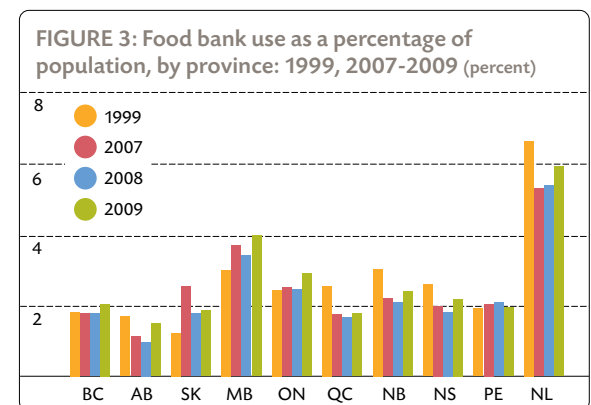
recession. Ontario food banks helped an additional 56,250 individuals compared to last year, Alberta helped an extra 20,396, and British Columbia helped 11,785 more. Taken together, food banks in these three provinces were challenged by an 18% increase in the number of clients receiving food.

Figure 2 shows trends in individuals assisted, by province, for March 1999, 2007, 2008, and 2009.



2.4% of Canadians were helped by food banks in March

Considered nationally, food bank use as a percentage of the population is currently at the same level faced a decade ago, in 1999. However, the national view hides significant disparities amongst the provinces, as shown in Figure 3. Current levels in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario are significantly higher than in 1999, whereas food banks in Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland & Labrador are now assisting a smaller proportion of provincial populations.



In March 2009, 9.1% of those turning to food banks for help were doing so for the first time. This amounts to 72,231 new clients in that month alone. There was little variance in this figure across the provinces, with the exception of Alberta, where new clients accounted for 16% of the total.

As in past years, children made up a significant percentage (37.2%) of those assisted by food banks. Children were particularly highly represented in Manitoba (49%), Saskatchewan (44%), and Alberta (43%). Overall, 293,677 children were assisted by a food bank in March of this year.

Table 1 presents the total number of individuals assisted by food banks in each province for 2008 and 2009, as well as the percentage of those assisted who are children and youth under 18 years of age.

TABLE 1: Food bank use in Canada, by province

Province/Territory	Total Assisted, March 2009	Total Assisted, March 2008	Change, 2008-2009	Percent Change, 2008-2009	Percent Children, March 2009
British Columbia	89,886	78,101	11,785	15.1%	31.4%
Alberta	53,976	33,580	20,396	60.7%	43.2%
Saskatchewan	18,875	17,751	1,124	6.3%	44.4%
Manitoba	47,925	40,464	7,461	18.4%	48.7%
Ontario	374,230	314,258	59,972	19.1%	37.6%
Quebec	137,464	127,536	9,928	7.8%	33.9%
New Brunswick	17,889	15,638	2,251	14.4%	33.8%
Nova Scotia	20,344	16,915	3,429	20.3%	34.1%
Prince Edward Island	2,706	2,892	-186	-6.4%	35.8%
Newfoundland & Labrador	30,014	27,260	2,754	10.1%	37.4%
Territories	1,429	1,340	89	6.6%	36.5%
Canada	794,738	675,735⁶	119,003	17.6%	37.2%

293,677

children were assisted by food banks in March 2009

Use of meal programs is surging

In addition to providing grocery hampers to their clients, many food banks offer meals to those in need through soup kitchens, school breakfast and lunch programs, shelters, drop-in centres, and other venues. In March 2009, food banks and affiliated agencies served a total of 3,252,134 meals across the country – a slight increase of 5% over 2008, and an increase of 39% over the same period in 2007.



Who is turning to food banks?

In terms of household composition, food bank use did not change significantly from 2008 to 2009. Nearly half of assisted households were families with children, split about evenly between two-parent and single-parent families. The proportion of single people turning to food banks for help edged up

49% are families with children

slightly compared to 2008, from 38.5% to 39.2% of the total. **Figure 4** shows the household composition of those assisted by food banks nationally.⁷

In 2007, Food Banks Canada began asking food banks to report on two service groups for whom there exists little food bank-related information: new immigrants and Aboriginal people.

Findings from 2008 and 2009 show that new immigrants make up a significant percentage of individuals assisted by food banks, accounting for more than 10% of those helped in each of the past two years. In 2009, new immigrants accounted for 10.5% of those assisted, with the majority centred in Canada's larger cities.⁸

Aboriginal people constitute a slightly larger proportion of food bank clients, making up more

12% of those assisted are Aboriginal

than 11% of those assisted in 2008 and 2009. For the most recent year, self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people comprised 12% of those assisted by food banks. Provincial figures vary considerably, with Aboriginal people accounting for 91% of food bank clients in the territories and 35% in the four western provinces.⁹

Table 2 provides detailed information on the number of Aboriginal people assisted by food banks.

FIGURE 4: Household composition of food bank clients: March 2009 (percent)

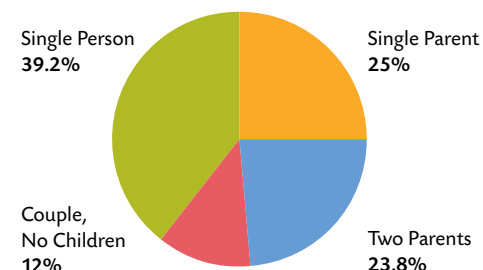


TABLE 2: Self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people assisted by food banks: March 2009

Province/Territory	Total Assisted, March 2009	Percent Identifying as Aboriginal
British Columbia	89,886	19.2%
Alberta	53,976	32.6%
Saskatchewan	18,875	62.5%
Manitoba	47,925	55.4%
Ontario	374,230	6.5%
Quebec	137,464	n/a
New Brunswick	17,889	3.6%
Nova Scotia	20,344	5.2%
Prince Edward Island	2,706	6.8%
Newfoundland & Labrador	30,014	0.02%
Territories	1,429	91.2%
Canada	794,738	11.6%

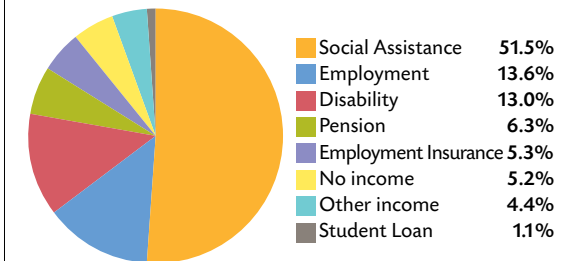
Primary sources of income of those needing food assistance

This year's *HungerCount* findings show little change in the primary source of income reported by individuals and families turning to food banks. As in 2008, nearly one-fifth of assisted households reported income from current or recent employment. The percentage currently working slipped slightly to 13.6% of the total, from 14.5% in 2008 – though the actual *number* of working households assisted by food banks rose this year, along with the overall national increase.

19% report income from current or recent employment

As shown by **Figure 5**, those reporting income from social assistance remained steady, at 52% of the total. The same is true for households receiving the majority of their income from disability-related income supports (13%), and for those reporting income from a pension (6.3%).¹⁰

FIGURE 5: Primary income source of assisted households: March 2009 (percent)



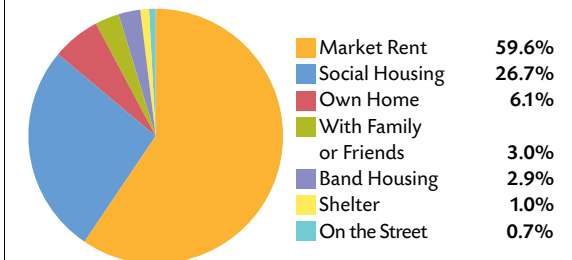
Where do food bank clients call home?

The vast majority (87%) of those assisted by food banks live in rental accommodations, with 60% of households paying market rent and 27% living in social housing. A small but significant number (6%) reported owning their own home. Nearly 5% were homeless – down from 8% in 2008 – with the majority of these households (3%) staying with family

87% live in rented accommodations

or friends, as shown in **Figure 6**.¹¹ These numbers remain largely unchanged from *HungerCount* results for 2007 and 2008.

FIGURE 6: Housing situation of food bank clients: March 2009 (percent)



Food bank patterns in rural Canada

Canada has become a largely urban nation, with only 20% of Canadians now living in rural areas.¹² From a strictly demographic view, food bank use is also largely an urban phenomenon: food banks located in just 25 cities help more than half of all people assisted by food banks in Canada. In 2009, food banks in our small towns and rural areas accounted for only 11% of those who turned to food banks for a helping hand.

Hunger in rural Canada is nevertheless a reality, and communities have responded to the problem by adopting the food bank model. Of the 781 food banks and food programs that submitted a survey for *HungerCount 2009*, 350 were located in areas with populations of less than 10,000.

The housing situation of those assisted by food banks in Canada's small towns and rural areas also differs significantly from their urban counterparts. Roughly twice the proportion (nearly 15%) of assisted households report living in a home they own, and a much smaller number report renting. Of those who rent, 52% pay market rent and 15% live in

11% of those helped live in small towns or rural areas

The situation of people assisted by food banks in small towns and rural areas differs significantly from those in urban Canada. Individuals outside of Canada's cities are less likely to be working, with only 12% of households reporting income from employment. People using food banks in rural areas are more likely to be living on disability-related income supports (14%) or a pension (9%).¹³

Figure 7 provides information on the primary income source of households assisted by food banks in small towns and rural areas.

social housing. Similar to 2008 figures, 11% of those assisted by food banks in small towns and rural areas reside in band-owned housing. Lastly, as shown in **Figure 8**, significantly more (6.2%) report that they are living temporarily with family or friends – often referred to as “couch surfing.”¹⁴

FIGURE 7: Primary source of income in rural areas: March 2009 (percent)

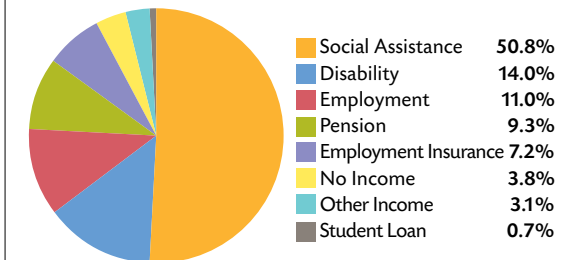
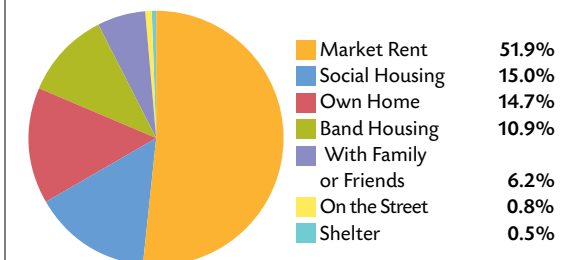


FIGURE 8: Housing situation of food bank clients in rural areas: March 2009 (percent)



Food banks are struggling too

Food banks provide an essential service to their communities, and significant help to the people they assist. At the same time, the help they provide is, from a larger perspective, limited. Two-thirds of food banks provide five or fewer days' worth of food per visit, and 28% offer three days' worth or less. Though a quarter are able to offer assistance more often, the majority (55%) offer help only once a month.

This year, with increased usage due to the severe economic downturn, food banks – 49% of whom have no paid staff – are struggling to meet the need for food assistance. The battle to keep the doors open and food coming in is a constant: 35% of food banks lack adequate, good quality space; 22% lack necessary equipment such as shelving and cold storage; 23% strive, and fail, to recruit enough volunteers to fully manage everyday operations.

These needs are, unfortunately, part of the status quo for food banks in Canada. More pressing – and concerning – is the fact that 28% of food banks report lacking adequate funding, and 31% report not having enough food to meet the need.

Lastly, it is common knowledge that many food banks buy certain types of food – such as milk, eggs, meat, and peanut butter – that are difficult to stock through donations alone. However, this year 55% of food banks (up from 32% in 2008) bought more food than usual to keep up with the need. Thirty-six percent reported giving less food than usual, up from 15% in 2008. Thirteen percent of food banks actually ran out of food in March, up from 7% in 2008.

28%

of food banks lack
adequate funding

31%

of food banks do
not have enough food
to meet the need

36%

of food banks were
forced to give out less
food than usual

How do we turn the tide?



Since late last year, Canadian media discourse and policy discussion have understandably been dominated by talk of the recession. It is important that we not let this distract us from the fact that, even before the economic downturn, food banks and their affiliated agencies had been assisting more than 700,000 people per month for most of the past decade. This is a status quo that can, and must, change.

Three recessions in three decades – 1981-82, 1990-91, and 2008-09 – have provided a regular dose of economic pain for the country. The current recession has led to the largest increase in food bank use on record, with many Canadians stepping through the front door of a food bank for the first time because of it. The repercussions of the economic downturn will be felt for years to come.

As the Canadian economy begins to grow again, it is crucially important that we take stock of the causes of Canada's hunger problem, and that we address these causes directly. Food bank use is the result of a number of complex issues that, nevertheless, can be addressed through the engagement of all sectors of society, and through intelligent social and economic policy.

The facts about low income in Canada

Low income, whether in the short or long term, is the one thing all of those assisted by food banks have in common. It is the major cause of household food insecurity and hunger, and it is a serious problem in Canada:

- In 2007, 2,952,000 individuals (9.2% of the population), including 637,000 children, had annual incomes below the Statistics Canada after-tax low income cut-off (LICO); for a single person, the after-tax LICO in 2007 was \$11,745.
 - Between 2002 and 2007, 20% of Canadians experienced at least one year of low income.
 - Between 2002 and 2007, 8% of Canadians experienced at least three years of low income.¹⁵
- Compared to similar countries, Canada has relatively high rates of poverty and inequality. Notably, our country has the 19th highest rate of poverty among 29 comparable developed economies.¹⁶ With specific reference to Canada's employment situation, Statistics Canada recently found that our country "has one of the highest

Government leaders speak out

Recently, three highly-placed provincial politicians have spoken out about the extreme shortcomings of provincial welfare programs. British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell stated in September that “Income assistance is clearly the last social safety net into which any worker wants to fall... those who are forced to go on welfare risk entering a cycle of dependency.”¹⁷ Similarly, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said that, “Unwittingly, we have developed a policy that stomps you into the ground.”¹⁸ Most recently, New Brunswick Minister of Social Development Kelly Lamrock stated, “For over 20 years, the changes to social assistance have generally been ones driven by the need for government to save money and shrink the circle of those who qualify.”¹⁹

proportions of low-paid workers among similarly industrialized countries.”²⁰ Further, the employment earnings of middle- and lower-income Canadians have been declining or stagnant since 1980:

- The **bottom 20%** of earners made \$19,367 in 1980, versus \$15,375 in 2005 – a decline of 21%.
 - The **middle 20%** of earners made \$41,348 in 1980, versus \$41,401 in 2005 – thus gaining no earning power.
 - The **top 20%** of earners made \$74,084 in 1980, versus \$86,253 in 2005 – an increase of 16.4%.²¹
- Many are working harder for less, thanks to a decline in well-paying jobs (particularly in, but not limited to, manufacturing and forestry) and an increase in precarious employment – i.e. employment that pays less, is less likely to provide full-time hours, and is less likely to offer non-wage benefits like supplementary health, dental, prescription drug, and pension coverage.

In 2007, the retail sector surpassed manufacturing as the largest supplier of jobs in the country. The average employee in the retail sector earned \$485.44 per week in March 2009, compared to \$934.82 in manufacturing. Wages in the growing accommodation and food services sector are even lower, at an average of \$333.15 per week. Together, these two sectors employ more than 2.9 million Canadians.²²

It is clear that, from a national perspective, the labour market has become a more difficult place to try to make a living, particularly for those with low levels of education and literacy. It is a distressing

fact that working families account for about 40% of people living in low income in Canada.

For those unable to find a job or unable to work, and therefore relegated to turning to welfare for a basic income, the situation is arguably worse.

Social assistance benefit levels are, as the National Council of Welfare has pointed out, “far below what most people would consider reasonable. [People on welfare] are so impoverished that they cannot access the resources that many of us take for granted – resources such as adequate housing, employment and recreational opportunities.”²³ A look at typical incomes provided by welfare supports this characterization.

In 2007:

- A single person on welfare in New Brunswick had to find a way to live on \$3,574 per year.
- A single person with a disability on welfare in Montreal – where it costs \$7,068 to rent a one-bedroom apartment for 12 months²⁴ – received \$10,500 in benefits for the entire year.
- A single parent with one child on social assistance in Manitoba had to pay for housing, heat and electricity, food, clothing, and other necessities with an annual income of \$14,664.
- A couple with two children on social assistance in British Columbia had \$20,283 per year to make ends meet.²⁵

With these income levels, it is no wonder that half of households assisted by food banks report that social assistance is their primary source of income. The program, almost without exception, provides far too little to survive on.

Hunger in Canada – looking beyond the recession

Though food bank use is an important indicator of current economic hardship, it does not tell the whole story about household food insecurity and hunger. While 2.4% of Canadians are assisted by a food bank each month, the most recent Canadian evidence shows that 8.8% of the population – 2.7 million people – will experience household food insecurity at some point during the year.²⁶

This situation held before the 2009 recession hit Canada. At the tail end of the recession, we can realistically predict that more Canadians will lose economic ground, fall into poverty, and be at risk of hunger. Research on the after-effects of the recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s gives us some idea of what to expect in the next few years:

- Job losses continued for 17 months after the 1981-82 recession, and for 29 months after the 1990-91 recession;²⁷ we should expect, and prepare for, the same for the current period.
- We can expect that laid-off workers will experience long-term – in many cases permanent – income losses of up to 22% for men, and up to 31% for women; long-tenured workers are likely to be hardest hit by job losses during the recession.²⁸
- The recession will have significant long-term implications for individuals and families, particularly those forced onto social assistance because of job losses, ineligibility for Employment Insurance, or exhaustion of EI benefits.

In Canada's current social policy configuration, the dominant approach to dealing with these problems, and with the negative outcomes they produce, is to address them after the fact. As a result, Canadian families, food banks, shelters, social service agencies, and hospitals bear the heavy burden created when individuals fall into poverty.

With prevention such a minor element in Canadian social policy, poverty and household food insecurity can exact a severe toll on those who fall victim to them. Poverty and food insecurity are major causes of poor adult physical health, with strong links to chronic disease such as arthritis, diabetes, heart problems, cancer, and hypertension. They are also predictors of low infant birth weight, increased infant mortality, and overall poor child health and development.²⁹

Recent reports from the United Kingdom,³⁰ the United States,³¹ and Canada³² provide a forceful accounting of how much these issues – and the social policy configuration in which they exist – is costing society as a whole. In Ontario alone it is estimated that, through losses related to health care costs, the justice system, social assistance, and forgone taxes, current levels of poverty cost the equivalent of at least \$2,300 annually per household – a total of at least \$10.4 billion per year. This works out nationally to a yearly loss of \$24.4 billion. In other words, Canada's inability to address hunger and poverty to the same degree as other, comparable countries, is costing all of us.

8.8%

of the population, or

2.7 million

people, will experience household food insecurity at some point during the year

Let's build on recent progress

During the past year, there has been progress on addressing hunger and poverty at both the provincial and federal government levels.

At the provincial level, the range and evolution of the services and supports available to low-income Canadians is extensive, and several notable developments have taken place in the past year. The Government of Manitoba joined the group of provinces – now including Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario – with poverty reduction plans, and the Government of New Brunswick has made several positive steps toward the same goal. The Ontario government nearly doubled

the amount of the Ontario Child Benefit – available to all families in the province regardless of their source of income – to a maximum of \$1,100 per child, per year. These are positive signs of openings and opportunities for forward momentum – we must take advantage while it lasts.

At the federal level, we have seen limited but important developments, including:

- Investment in a strengthened Working Income Tax Benefit, which provides an important supplement to the earnings of low-income working Canadians.
- Ongoing investments in affordable housing through federal–provincial cash transfers, and

through Budget 2009 spending on social housing, targeted funding for supportive housing for low-income seniors and people with disabilities, and for First Nations and Northern housing.

- Changes to the National Child Benefit Supplement, allowing some low-income families to earn more while maintaining eligibility for benefits.
- Changes to Employment Insurance, including a temporary five-week extension of benefits, and increased investments in training and benefits for long-tenured workers who have lost their jobs.

A full-society approach to reducing hunger in Canada

This year's recession has brought unprecedented attention to the income-related struggles of Canadians. As the economy strengthens and begins to grow once again, it is crucially important that all Canadians are able to gain a footing. The policy recommendations outlined below are designed to help ensure this. The recommendations build on a few fundamental ideas:

- Insufficient income, both for employed and unemployed Canadians, is the most important cause of hunger.
- Food banks can offer limited help to those in need in the short term; we all – social service agencies and other non-profit organizations, governments,

the business community, individuals – have a role to play in reducing hunger in the long term.

- It is the responsibility of governments at all levels to ensure that vulnerable citizens – whether they need help in the short or long term – have access to the supports they need to build well-being and contribute to their communities.
- Government-supported efforts must be seen as long-term investments in the well-being of those living with low income, and in overall social well-being. A view of social programs as simple budget expenditures does not provide a full accounting of the benefits of those programs.

Significantly reducing hunger and poverty in Canada requires the effort of all sectors of society. Following are recommendations for individuals, the business community, and provincial and federal governments.

Recommendations for individuals

It is easy to forget the difference a single person can make in someone else's life. However, organizations such as Pathways to Education and Vibrant Communities have shown the power of individuals to change communities, and of communities to change themselves. There are many ways to get involved, of which the following are merely a few:

1 Mentor an individual or family that is struggling economically. Maybe you have already overcome the same challenges they are facing and have lessons you can share.

2 Join the board of a community social service agency or other non-profit organization. And tell your friends and family about it.

3 Volunteer at a community centre or after-school program. If you don't already, contribute to building your community's capacity to support all its members – physically, socially, and economically.

Recommendations for business

For-profit organizations, both large and small, are underappreciated as incubators of positive economic and social change. It is crucial for businesses to be open to a role as a platform for the workforce entry of people facing barriers to employment. For example, businesses can:

1 Reach out to community social service agencies – how can you work together to increase economic opportunities for people experiencing low income and hunger, and who face barriers to employment?

2 Look outside the usual avenues for volunteer interns – a good volunteer job can be the ticket to good paying work for those who are unemployed or under-employed.

3 Look inward – are your policies or practices creating disadvantages for individuals who face barriers to employment?

Recommendations for provincial governments

Canada's 10 provincial governments carry the bulk of responsibility for the funding and management of social assistance, social services, education and training, and health care. They also shoulder the greatest responsibility for the well-being of those experiencing low income and hunger. Though a full discussion of provincial social policy is beyond the parameters of our recommendations, there is one issue that cannot be avoided: welfare, a provincial program meant to bridge the gap between periods of employment, serves instead to deplete households of most of their wealth and make it exceedingly difficult to become self-sufficient.^{33,34}

There are two major shortcomings related to welfare, regardless of the province in which the program is operating:

- As outlined above, social assistance benefit levels are in the majority of cases not sufficient to meet even the most basic human needs – housing, food, transportation, and clothing.
- Social assistance program rules make it difficult to access the program and – what is surprising to many – to leave the program once in the system. Those forced to rely on welfare must deplete nearly all sources of income and wealth before becoming eligible for the program. Once eligible and in receipt of benefits, people face the fact that most income gained through employment, student loans, or other sources is taxed back through reductions in already rock-bottom benefit payments. This is a recipe for deep and long-standing disadvantage.

Changing this entrenched system will not be easy. However, positive steps have already been taken in several provinces. For example, Ontario has made positive changes to its welfare program, and Newfoundland & Labrador has recently raised benefit levels for certain types of households. Some provinces and territories have begun to take a more supportive, capacity-building approach to social assistance, for example by focusing on effective training and job placement for those able to work, and more adequate benefits for those facing serious barriers to employment.

Leaders in many provinces have shown that they understand change is necessary. The solutions to welfare's problems must be province-specific, and must be driven by input from those most affected by the program's shortcomings. At the same time, adequate change is unlikely without a high level of cooperation among municipal, provincial, and federal governments – it is truly a national issue.

Recommendations for the federal government

Canadians are the beneficiaries of a progressive system of federal social benefits, rooted in defining programs like universal health care, the Canada Pension Plan, and the Canada Child Tax Benefit. Programs like these help ensure that the majority of Canadians share in the national prosperity. It is crucial that current and future federal governments maintain and build upon these investments in our collective well-being. The current federal government can do this through the following steps:

- 1 Maintain planned levels of federal transfers, including the Canadian Social Transfer, to provincial, territorial, and First Nations governments.
- 2 Implement a federal poverty prevention and reduction strategy, with measurable targets and timelines, developed in consultation with municipal and provincial governments, business, the non-profit sector, and individual Canadians.
- 3 Ensure that post-recession economic development and rebuilding takes account of the needs of low-income Canadians. Only by accounting for those most vulnerable to hunger and poverty from the beginning can we arrive at an improved, inclusive social and economic reality.

4 Continue to work to make the Employment Insurance (EI) system more fair and inclusive. For workers in regions of low unemployment, the current structure of EI is a recipe for the further growth of low-wage employment. Manufacturing continues to decline as a source of jobs, while low-wage service sector employment is expanding. Unemployed people without access to EI will be forced into jobs that are more likely to be low-paying, part-time, temporary, and without extra-wage benefits.

5 Increase investment in the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). The changes to the CCTB contained in Budget 2009 were welcome. However, these changes will have no effect on the incomes of parents earning less than \$20,000 per year. As outlined by the Caledon Institute,³⁵ increasing the Canada Child Tax Benefit to a maximum of \$5,000 per child, per year (up from about \$3,300), will help ensure that parents have incomes above the poverty line, and are adequately supported in raising their children.

6 Invest in a system of quality, affordable, accessible child care. The reality of the Canadian economy is that it takes two wage earners to live well. Dependable child care is an absolute necessity for the economic health of families, and for healthy child development.

7 Continue to increase uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) among low-income seniors. The end of poverty – and of food bank use – among seniors is close at hand. However, there remains a small but significant number of seniors

who live with incomes below the after-tax LICO. Attention to GIS uptake would go a long way to addressing this issue.³⁶

8 Increase GIS benefit levels. Though Old Age Security (OAS) and the GIS bring the majority of low-income seniors above the after-tax LICO, the maximum OAS/GIS payment of about \$14,000 per year is still quite meagre.³⁷

9 Invest in the improvement of housing in rural areas. A recent report of the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry makes the case that federal funding for rural housing repair and improvement is seriously inadequate to need. Food Banks Canada supports the Standing Committee's recommendations with regard to rural housing: (a) increase federal funding allocated to housing repair and improvement in rural areas; and (b) initiate a review of housing repair and improvement programs to ensure they are effectively meeting objectives.³⁸

10 Continue to invest in affordable housing in Canada's urban areas. Current federal-provincial affordable housing agreements, and the housing-related announcements in the 2009 federal Budget, are positive developments. However, appropriate housing continues to be unaffordable for many households. The successful creation and improvement of adequate levels of affordable housing requires long-term, predictable federal funding.

Provincial perspectives on hunger

Across the country, findings from this year's *HungerCount* survey have much in common. An increase in demand, combined with shared struggles to meet the rising need for food assistance, is a pervasive theme.

The fallout from the downturn in Alberta's economy is particularly notable. Effects are described by *HungerCount* Provincial Coordinators within the province itself, and also in several of the Atlantic provinces, where those who had left for jobs in the West are now returning home as the jobs disappear.

Reports from Saskatchewan and Manitoba also bear close attention. Media and economic reports often make the case that these provinces escaped the worst of the recession, but the evidence from the front lines tells a different story.

Several of the following 10 reports raise the concern that the worst is not yet over, bringing attention to the fact that, though the recession may technically be over, its effects will be felt for the foreseeable future.



Food bank use in Canada by the numbers

March, 2009



British Columbia
89,886 people assisted
31% are children
+15% change, 2008 to 2009

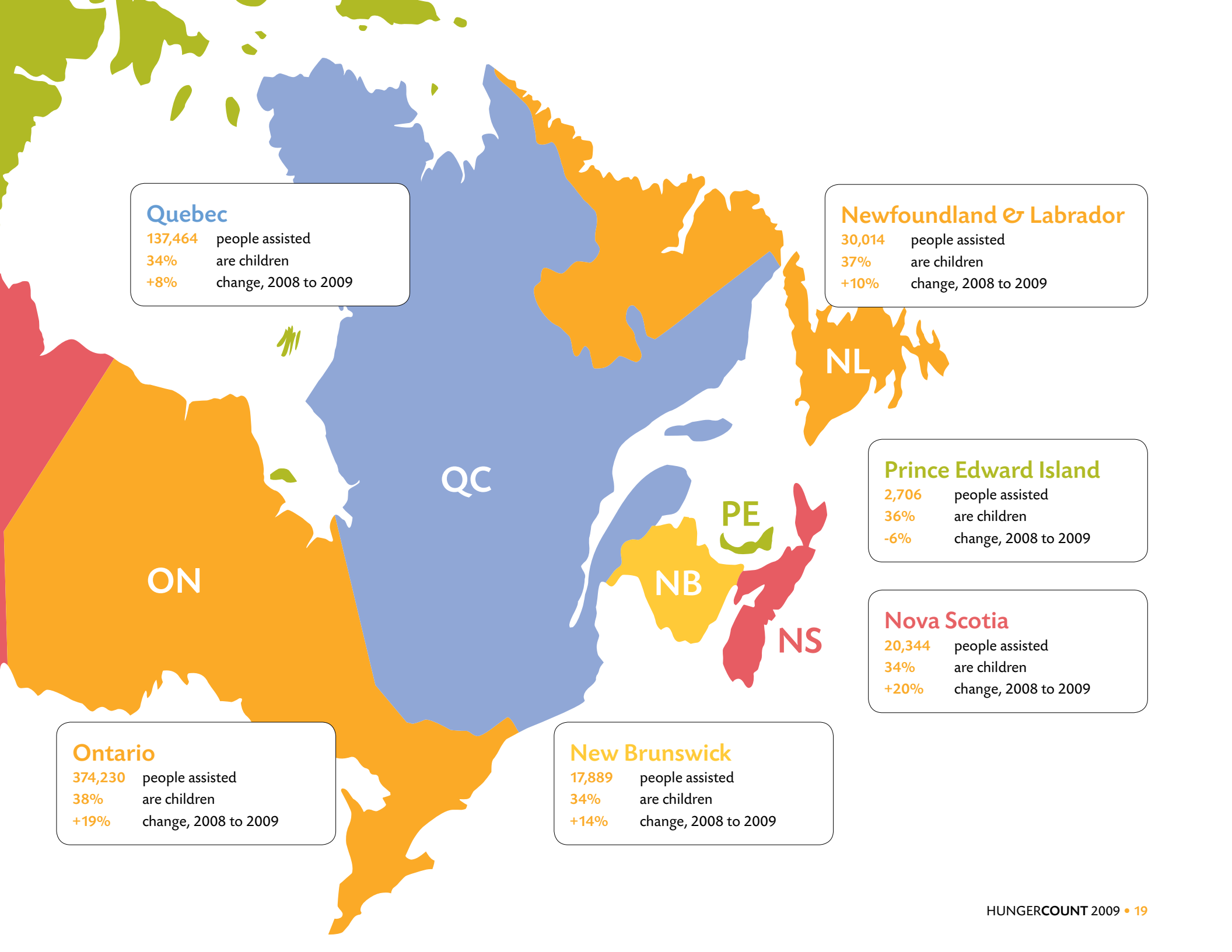
Manitoba
47,925 people assisted
49% are children
+18% change, 2008 to 2009

Alberta
53,976 people assisted
43% are children
+61% change, 2008 to 2009

Saskatchewan
18,875 people assisted
44% are children
+6% change, 2008 to 2009



Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut
1,429 people assisted
37% are children
+7% change, 2008 to 2009



Quebec

137,464 people assisted
34% are children
+8% change, 2008 to 2009

Newfoundland & Labrador

30,014 people assisted
37% are children
+10% change, 2008 to 2009

Prince Edward Island

2,706 people assisted
36% are children
-6% change, 2008 to 2009

Nova Scotia

20,344 people assisted
34% are children
+20% change, 2008 to 2009

Ontario

374,230 people assisted
38% are children
+19% change, 2008 to 2009

New Brunswick

17,889 people assisted
34% are children
+14% change, 2008 to 2009

British Columbia

Submitted by Food Banks British Columbia, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Heidi Gill, Abbotsford Community Services Food Bank

Highlights

89,886 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+15% change since March 2008

31% are children

12% report employment income

6% receive Employment Insurance

44% receive social assistance

19% receive disability-related income supports

81% of food banks saw an increase

Front line food bank workers across British Columbia are not surprised to hear that the 89,886 people assisted during the month of March was the highest number on record for our province. Most food banks felt the pressure of more people coming through their doors, undoubtedly a result of the economic downturn. *HungerCount* results show that 81% of food banks in the province saw an increase in the number of people assisted.

When asked his thoughts on the increased need for help at the Harvest of Hope Food Bank in Gibsons, food bank Director Matthew Hardman stated simply, "It's because of the economy, the recession, temporary closure of the pulp mill, and layoffs." His explanation was echoed by many of B.C.'s food banks when asked what contributed to the increased need: plant closures, industry cutbacks, and resulting job losses were major contributing factors to the rise in food bank use.

In early 2009, British Columbia saw a decline in most employment sectors. The province's jobless rate reached a five-year high of 7.4% in March, following seven consecutive months of job losses. The March unemployment rate stood in stark contrast to the 2008 figure, when the unemployment rate hovered near 4%. Joblessness among B.C. youth is now a particularly serious problem, with unemployment in this age group rising from 6.9% in March 2008 to 13.5% in March 2009.³⁹

According to the B.C. Ministry of Housing and Social Development, the number of people on welfare who are able and expected to work has increased by 50% over the last year. This number is remarkable, and is almost certainly tied to increased food bank use in the province. Benefit levels for welfare in British Columbia are not tied to any measure of low income, and they are not indexed to inflation. With few rate increases

Plant closures, industry cutbacks, and resulting job losses were major contributing factors to the rise in food bank use in British Columbia.

between the early 1990s and the present, families and individuals on welfare have lost purchasing power with each passing year.⁴⁰

People who use food banks in the province generally pay a disproportionate amount of their income towards rent, and B.C. continues to face an ongoing shortage of affordable housing. Very little new affordable housing stock is being built, and market rental housing availability has been eroded through demolition, redevelopment, and conversion of rental housing to condominiums. As of January 2009, there were 10,147 households on the provincial waiting list for subsidized housing.⁴¹

Increasing affordable housing, reducing homelessness, and helping the most vulnerable citizens were voiced as key priorities of the provincial government in 2009-10. The province's budget for affordable housing and shelters is \$469 million for the current fiscal year, which is significantly more than in previous years. This is a positive development, one that could be joined by attention to the province's other major social problem: the high rate of child poverty, which continues to be the highest in Canada.



Alberta

Submitted by Alberta Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Richard Le Sueur, Alberta Food Banks

Highlights

53,976 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+61% change since March 2008

43% are children

27% report employment income

5% receive Employment Insurance

32% receive social assistance

12% receive disability-related income supports

78% of food banks saw an increase

Since January of this year, there has been a dramatic shift in Alberta's economic situation. At the time of last year's *HungerCount* report, the provincial government was reporting a budgetary surplus totalling \$12 billion, and Alberta had an unemployment rate of 3.4%. As of September 2009, reports indicate a \$6.9 billion budget deficit⁴² and an unemployment rate that has reached 7.1%. More than 59,000 full-time jobs were lost between September 2008 and 2009, and many Albertans have attempted to fill the gap with part-time employment, which increased by 6% during the same period.⁴³

The downward pressure on Alberta's economy, largely a result of greatly reduced energy prices, has led to the cancellation or postponement of a number of major oil- and gas-related projects, which has in turn resulted in layoffs in many areas of the province. As well, Alberta has suffered downturns in the forestry and agricultural sectors.

Despite the economic downturn, life's basics – particularly housing – continue to be expensive in the province, and more individuals and families are struggling to bring in enough income to make ends meet, leading to increased household food insecurity for many. The primary income sources of those assisted by food banks were fairly consistent with those reported in 2008, the exception being a significant increase (from 2.7% to 4.9%) in those receiving federal Employment Insurance benefits.

The food bank sector is often among the first to see the effects of negative social and economic trends, a situation that is very evident in Alberta this year. Across the province, food banks have been seriously stretched. Many are spending more on food purchases this year, and more than one-third of food banks found it necessary to cut back on the amount of food they are able to offer to those they help. An indicator of the dramatic increase in food

Despite the economic downturn, life's basics – particularly housing – continue to be expensive and more households are struggling to bring in enough income to make ends meet, leading to increased household food insecurity.

bank use has been the significant rise in the number of volunteer hours required to service those needing food assistance.

In past years, Alberta *HungerCount* reports made the point that the province's booming economy had a dark side: economic growth has been matched by growth in the cost of living, which has made it difficult even for many working people to keep their heads above water. This problem continues in 2009 and is evident by the fact that the percentage of employed people utilizing food banks in Alberta is twice the national average. What is new this year is that the "working poor," those who are under- or unemployed, and those struggling on fixed incomes have been joined by those who, believing they had a stable income, stretched their expenses, only to see all or part of that income disappear.

Last year, another area of concern was seniors, who were having difficulty keeping up with basic living expenses on fixed incomes. This concern continues as the provincial government reviews health and social programs with a view to expense reduction and cost-cutting.

Once again, for the most part, communities in Alberta support their local food banks at a level close to 2008. Unfortunately, this support does not always provide sufficient resources for the province's food banks. In addition to purchasing food, they are increasingly turning to other food banks, or to the provincial association for assistance.



Saskatchewan

Submitted by Food Banks of Saskatchewan, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Linda Robinson, Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training, Regina & District Food Bank

Highlights

18,875 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+6% change since March 2008

44% are children

14.5% report employment income

3% receive Employment Insurance

59% receive social assistance

4.5% receive disability-related income supports

82% of food banks saw an increase

Canada is in recession, yet Saskatchewan's population is growing, and the provincial economy is said to be booming. Unfortunately, the overall benefits are reaching only a portion of Saskatchewan residents. For many individuals and families, hunger and poverty are still harsh realities of everyday life.

According to the 2009 *HungerCount* survey, 82% of Saskatchewan food banks reported an increase in food bank use compared to 2008, with demand at these food banks increasing by an average of 40%. The percentage of Aboriginal clients reached 63% of the total this year, with the majority of smaller food banks reporting an increase in service to this population. According to Bill Hall, Executive Director of Food Banks of Saskatchewan, "The crisis of Aboriginal poverty continues to affect our province and is indicated in the high percentage of First Nations people who need to use food banks. Lack of resources for proper nutrition is also evident in the number of our First Nations clients with special needs due to illness such as diabetes."

Though Saskatchewan has been widely promoted for its lower cost of living and abundant employment opportunities, not everyone migrating to the province has been able to secure stable employment or affordable housing. Those relocating to farming communities often find that there are

few job opportunities. Lack of a formal education prevents many capable individuals from entering the skilled trades or specialized training programs. Some job opportunities are only part-time or seasonal. Immigrants and refugees, recruited for their advanced education and skill levels, may face cultural and language barriers on top of difficulties with recognition of education and employment experiences outside Canada.

In Saskatchewan, the cost of food, gas, real estate, and rental properties is in many cases outpacing wage increases, and more and more individuals and families are becoming stereotyped as the "working poor" – holding down a job (or two) but unable to meet their monthly expenses. Rising costs can also pose serious problems for seniors, people on fixed incomes in general, and individuals facing health issues or disabilities, who have had to leave their jobs early but are unable to collect a pension and are not able to live solely on a disability allowance.

Rising food prices also present a challenge for families trying to make healthy food choices, particularly those on fixed incomes, and for people who require special diets. Many are forced to purchase low cost, lower quality foods. Others simply do not eat enough, and we know poor diets can lead to health issues for people of all ages. Children can't

learn on an empty stomach, nor can hungry adults become engaged, productive contributors within their communities.

Unfortunately, funding cutbacks in the province have reduced many of the programming supports that enable progress to higher education and employment, and there are long waiting lists for available programs. The shortage of affordable child care is an additional barrier to educational upgrading. Among those who meet the registration requirements of these programs, and are able to participate, many have been out of work for an extended period, or have never worked, and require added support to rebuild self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation before learning new skills, in order to recognize that they too can succeed in becoming productive, self-sufficient individuals.

As the national economy gets back on track, Saskatchewan will be ahead of the curve thanks to its above-average performance through the recession. However, the rise in food bank use over the past year shows that the outlook is not completely positive. With such robust economic health, it is time to invest in the economic well-being of all residents. This includes investment in more supportive social assistance programs, improved education and training for low-income adults, and programs that support the transition to work for those facing barriers to employment. There is untapped potential in our province, and it is time to unlock that potential.



Children can't learn on an empty stomach, nor can hungry adults become engaged, productive contributors within their communities.

Manitoba

Submitted by the Manitoba Association of Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Karen Flett, Winnipeg Harvest

Highlights

47,925 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+18% change since March 2008

49% are children

15.5% report employment income

3% receive Employment Insurance

54.5% receive social assistance

10% receive disability-related income supports

66% of food banks saw an increase

The province of Manitoba has not suffered the effects of the recession to the same extent as other provinces. In March of this year, the number of full-time jobs in the province actually grew slightly, as scores of jobs continued to disappear in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, two-thirds of Manitoba food banks experienced an increase in the number of people turning to them for help in March 2009, compared to the same period in 2008.

The year-over-year 18% increase in provincial food bank use seems to have been an effect of the leading edge of the recession entering Manitoba. These effects have become more clear recently, for example in a weakening labour market – employment decreased by 2.4% from August to September alone. This weakness seems particularly evident in part-time employment, which is an important source of income for working people assisted by food banks.⁴⁴

As the labour market contracts, the rising cost of living in Manitoba continues to present problems for those living on low incomes. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the rental housing vacancy rate in Winnipeg – home to 60% of the provincial population – is at an all time low, at around 1%.⁴⁵ With a low vacancy rate comes higher

rents, a situation seen across the province, as housing availability fails to keep up with the recent influx of immigrants from within and outside Canada.

Food bank staff see firsthand how unanticipated circumstances can lead to the need for food assistance. For example, in one recent month, there was a delay in social assistance payments to 5,000 individuals, which led to crises for many who rely on welfare to survive.

Another spike in requests for assistance came as a result of people failing to file their 2008 income tax returns. If an individual fails to file their return by the end of May, they do not receive a GST credit cheque at the beginning of July – a cheque on which many clients rely as part of their household budgets.

Of course, these spikes in need throughout the year are a consequence of longer term economic and social problems. In Manitoba, as in the rest of the country, we are seeing the loss of well-paying jobs, and an increase in the number of people working in jobs that pay less, are temporary, and provide few extra-wage benefits such as supplementary health, dental, prescription drug, and pension coverage. People are working just as hard, or harder, than they have in the past, but making less.

For those unable to work, or to find work, income assistance benefit levels are far too low to cover even basic necessities. A single, “employable” person in Manitoba on welfare receives \$5,827 annually – more than \$12,000 below the after-tax low income cut-off (LICO). A single person with a disability receives \$9,026 per year, nearly \$9,000 below the after-tax LICO.

Individuals and families living on these levels of income scrimp and save, turn to food banks and other programs for help, and are still barely able to make it to the next paycheque, Old Age Security cheque, or income assistance payment. When faced with a delayed cheque, or a week off work because of the flu or to care for a sick family member, economic struggle can very quickly turn to crisis.

Understanding that low income is the most important cause of hunger in Manitoba and across the country, Manitoba food banks highlighted three primary policy recommendations to reduce hunger: (1) increase social assistance benefit levels; (2) raise the provincial minimum wage; and (3) expand job training for adults. The provincial government’s recently-announced poverty reduction strategy is a welcome development, one that we will be following closely. It is crucially important that, as Canada climbs out of recession, the province remains committed to the goals set out in the “All Aboard” framework.



When faced with a delayed cheque, or a week off work because of the flu or to care for a sick family member, economic struggle can very quickly turn to crisis.

Ontario

Submitted by the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Nicola Cernik and Adam Spence, OAFB

Highlights

374,230 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+19% change since March 2008

38% are children

13% report employment income

5% receive Employment Insurance

43% receive social assistance

22% receive disability-related income supports

76% of food banks saw an increase

It has been a very difficult year for food banks and families in Ontario. The economic storm that was gathering a year ago touched down with brutal force in 2009. More than 200,000 full-time jobs have been lost in Ontario this year, leaving a record number of households no option but to turn to their local food bank for support. Despite statements made by economists about a technical end to the recession and signs of growth, the situation on the front line is very different. Food banks are still struggling as unemployment and food prices continue to rise, demand for services soars, and donations decline.

Almost 300 food banks from Windsor to Ottawa and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls tracked data on those they served during the month of March. The message heard from the front line is that client numbers have been increasing at an accelerated pace over the past year. The breadth and depth of that story is staggering. In March 2009, Ontario's food banks served 374,000 Ontarians – 2.9% of Ontario's population – in hundreds of villages, towns, large urban and smaller suburban centres. This represents an increase of 19% over 2008. Almost 40% of those served by Ontario's food banks are children, equal to more than 140,000 children every month. In addition, nearly 740,000 meals were served in March by meal programs supported by Ontario's food banks.

As a result of this tremendous increase in demand, 38% of Ontario's food banks do not have enough food to meet the needs of their clients. One in three

report that their ability to meet clients' needs has declined. These figures are the highest seen since the Ontario Association of Food Banks began asking these questions of its members in 2005. As a result, food banks are purchasing more food than ever before. Seventy-three percent of food banks are spending more money on food this year, and average monthly food expenditures have increased by 84%. On average, Ontario's food banks spend \$2,670 per month – \$32,040 per year – on food purchases. This has stretched their financial capacity beyond its limit. A majority (54%) of food banks will be over budgetary projections on food purchases in 2009.⁴⁶

Ontario's food banks depend on donations from individuals, community groups, business, and the food industry. In Ontario, we have witnessed an overall decline in food donations this year, in part due to the closure of more than 10 major food manufacturers – who have suffered the same hardships as the province's manufacturing sector overall – in the past 18 months. In total, we estimate that food donations in the province have declined by about one million pounds.

Food banks in Ontario have been forced to get creative. Relationships with local farmers are becoming more common; donations and the gleaning of farmers' fields after they have been harvested have led to increased amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables making their way into Ontario's food banks this fall. Unfortunately, these generous donations do

not qualify as charitable gifts, as the provincial government does not yet have any kind of tax credit to recognize and compensate donors. This is why the OAFB is lobbying for an Ontario Producer and Processor Donation Tax Credit in order to provide an incentive for food donations by the province's farmers and processors.

Beyond providing immediate relief to those in need, we must urge governments to ensure that families have the right supports to manage through the downturn. The provincial government must engage in a comprehensive review and reform of social assistance that includes the elimination of punitive rules, as well as a broader conversation regarding the necessary system of supports required to ensure economic security for all Ontarians. Federal government reforms to improve the adequacy and accessibility of Employment Insurance will also help immeasurably.

Though Ontario's food banks are struggling to respond to the damage caused by the global economic downturn, we are resilient, and we will weather the storm that hangs overhead. But we cannot do it alone. We need our neighbours to give generously this season, and we need our provincial government to provide incentives for local producers and processors to donate fresh, local foods that will increase our ability to meet Ontarians' immediate needs. We also need to be clear that food banks are not a substitute for good public policy. Both levels of government must make investments in measures to help Ontarians manage the impacts of the economic downturn.

We must join together to work toward a hunger-free Ontario.



As a result of this tremendous increase in demand, 38% of Ontario's food banks do not have enough food to meet the needs of their clients.

Quebec

Submitted by Food Banks Quebec, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Richard Décarie, Food Banks Quebec

Highlights

137,464 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+8% change since March 2008

34% are children

11.5% report employment income

4% receive Employment Insurance

66% receive social assistance

78% of food banks saw an increase

In 2008 Quebec saw a significant increase in the need for food assistance. The situation in 2009 is more complex, as the economic recession has had repercussions that will be felt by individuals over the long-term, and in a more pernicious way within the approximately 1,000 food assistance organizations in Quebec.

Unfortunately, the significant increase in the need for food assistance in the province (as high as 15 to 20%, depending on the region), and therefore in the needs of organizations assisting people living with economic insecurity, has come at the same time as a large decrease (20 to 25%) in donations of food.

This paradox is borne out in this year's *HungerCount* results. While survey findings show an increase of nearly 8% in the number of people assisted by food banks in Quebec, the increase in *actual* need is much higher. Food banks are meeting only about one-third of requests, and this within a rich country like Canada.

In order to meet the real needs of Quebecers who are most affected by the current world economic crisis, Food Banks Quebec is consolidating its support operations and its representation to its member organizations, in addition to pressing on in our goal of achieving food security in all regions of Quebec.

Unfortunately, the significant increase in the need for food assistance in Quebec has come at the same time as a large decrease in donations of food.

New Brunswick

Submitted by the New Brunswick Association of Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by George Piers, Fredericton Community Kitchen

New Brunswick does not appear to have suffered from the recession to the same extent as other areas of Canada. However, the economic downturn in Western Canada and Ontario has resulted in increased demand on charitable food programs in our province. Food banks and soup kitchens have seen a steady increase in clientele, including those returning home or passing through to the other Atlantic provinces. Those who have returned with skills in carpentry, plumbing, and electrical have easily obtained jobs with contractors, and this has put various building projects ahead of schedule in New Brunswick. For example, a 350-bed seniors' residence in Fredericton is now a year and a half ahead of schedule as a direct result of the influx of skilled and unskilled labour.

New Brunswick continues to experience weakness in the lumber industry, which has always been a mainstay for unskilled labourers. Many small, private lumber mills providing direct and indirect employment for hundreds of people have shut down, either for periods of time or permanently. The fishing industry took a hit in the spring from low lobster prices, and again this fall by the "red tide" effect (harmful algal blooms) that can make shellfish dangerous to eat. Areas in north-western New Brunswick have suffered from these events.

The Canaport LNG regasification project in Saint John opened up considerable job opportunities in

that area, with spin-offs in increasing housing sales and new construction. Moncton continues to forge ahead with many businesses expanding and relocating to that area. Throughout the province, infrastructure continues to employ many people who otherwise would be unemployed. This has been a direct result of the federal infusion of capital project money.

The concept of eating locally has been a real benefit to farmers throughout New Brunswick. This concept has allowed them to increase sales from the farm gate as well as from public markets. As a result, farmers have been able to employ people, usually on a part-time basis, who have been depending on shelters and soup kitchens for their survival. Small contractors such as painters and home renovators have also been drawing from this population.

Food banks and soup kitchens continue to struggle to bring in the resources needed to fund the basics – transportation, rent, staff salaries, insurance. Food has generally been in good supply, both from local sources and the food industry through Food Banks Canada, which means food banks are using fewer resources to buy food. Farmers and backyard gardeners have been supplying fresh vegetables and fruit to food banks and soup kitchens in many areas.

In New Brunswick, poverty and hunger remain at unacceptable levels. We must continue to work together in all aspects of society to assist those in need and help them make a better life for themselves.

Highlights

17,889 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+14% change since March 2008

34% are children

12% report employment income

9% receive Employment Insurance

60% receive social assistance

6% receive disability-related income supports

71% of food banks saw an increase

A new hope for people living on low incomes has come with the appointment of our new Lieutenant Governor, Graydon Nicholas. In his acceptance speech, he pledged a dedication of support to the

less fortunate of this province. The poverty reduction plan being developed by the provincial government is another positive step – but much work is needed to ensure real, long-term change.

Nova Scotia

Submitted by FEED NOVA SCOTIA, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Dianne Swinemar, Becky Mason, and Julianne Acker-Verney, FEED NOVA SCOTIA

Highlights

20,344 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+20% change since March 2008

34% are children

8% report employment income

6% receive Employment Insurance

56% receive social assistance

10% receive disability-related income supports

67% of food banks saw an increase

The perspective offered by FEED NOVA SCOTIA is based on the experience of our 150 member agencies and a number of non-member agencies that participate in the *HungerCount* survey each year. Our province is diverse and so is the experience of hunger and poverty. Emergency food assistance programs across Nova Scotia are large and small, rural and urban, and often provide much more than food.

Despite claims that Nova Scotia suffered less devastation than most Canadian provinces during the recession,⁴⁷ a larger number of people received assistance from provincial food banks and meal programs in March 2009 than in the previous two years. There was a 20% increase in the number of people receiving assistance from food banks in March 2009 compared to March 2008.

The financial situation for individual Nova Scotians and the general population was negatively affected by the same issues experienced in many other jurisdictions

across Canada and around the world – a continuing rise in food costs, an increase in electricity costs,⁴⁸ a reduction in demand for products and services, and the declining performance of economies at the community, provincial, national, and global levels.

The increased demand on Nova Scotia food banks reflects, at least to some degree, the global economic recession. News reports in the first two quarters of 2009 were punctuated by stories of people suddenly finding themselves out of work and facing an uncertain future because of plant and business closures in the manufacturing, forestry, farming, and fishing sectors. Many experienced long waits while applications for Employment Insurance were processed, which drained household financial resources. The need for interim food support often became longer-term, as families wrestled with financial commitments and household expenses on an EI-based income.

Some workers who retained employment during the recession found themselves earning less than in the recent past. Market demand influences production levels, and some Nova Scotians assisted by food banks have told us of earning less because of reduced work hours, temporary shutdowns, and fewer opportunities to perform piece work. We are seeing people who work multiple jobs and who still turn to food banks, because they have insufficient funds to buy enough food to feed their families after the bills are paid.

Of course, economic uncertainty at the personal level has an effect outside an individual's home. Some Nova Scotians, who in the past supported their

neighbours and local food bank, were unable to do so this year. Food bank coordinators are now seeing former supporters requesting help as the pressures of the larger economic context are felt at home. On the other side of the coin, long-term recipients of food assistance are experiencing deepening poverty as expenses rise disproportionately to income. Nova Scotia's minimum wage – currently \$8.60 per hour – is scheduled to increase to \$9.20 on April 1, 2010.

On a positive note, the recent Speech from the Throne from our province's first NDP government promises activity on items associated with the Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy unveiled in April 2009.



We are seeing people who work multiple jobs and who still turn to food banks, because they have insufficient funds to buy enough food to feed their families after the bills are paid.

Prince Edward Island

Submitted by the Prince Edward Island Association of Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Mike MacDonald, Upper Room Food Bank

Highlights

2,706	individuals were assisted, March 2009
- 6%	change since March 2008
36%	are children
20%	report employment income
19%	receive Employment Insurance
39%	receive social assistance
8%	receive disability-related income supports
50%	of food banks saw an increase

Although there have not been significant changes in food bank use on Prince Edward Island during the month of March, food banks continue to be busy and seem to be getting busier by the month. When we compare March of 2009 to March of 2008, we have actually seen a small decrease in food bank usage. However, in the months following March 2009, some food banks are reporting significant increases. These increases are primarily in the urban areas of Charlottetown and Summerside, with one food bank reporting an increase of 30% when comparing the January-September 2009 period to the same time span in 2008.

Food banks are currently assisting a high number of people who have returned from the western provinces because of a decline in the availability of employment. In general, when we speak to those coming through our doors about why they need help, we hear two recurring themes. The first is employment. For some people this refers to the lack of employment opportunities and the inability to find work. For others this means working in low-wage jobs, or working in jobs that provide limited hours

of employment each week. The second theme is the elevated cost of housing. Many of our clients report having difficulties paying their rent or mortgage. The cost of maintaining and heating their homes is also a great expense that eats into most household budgets.

The composition of the households helped by food banks on Prince Edward Island has not changed much in comparison to 2008. Almost 60% of the households using food banks are families with children, and it is these families who seem to be having the most problems with the cost of housing.

The economy still seems to be the main reason people are using food banks in the province. Almost 40% of our clients are employed or on Employment Insurance, and still cannot make ends meet because of low wages and insufficient work hours. It is clear that Prince Edward Island needs a higher minimum wage just so families can survive.

The increases in need that some food banks are reporting has a real impact on both paid staff and volunteers. It has been a challenge, and the challenge will continue.

Newfoundland & Labrador

Submitted by the Community Food Sharing Association of Newfoundland & Labrador (CFSA),

Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Eg Walters, Community Food Sharing Association

For the second year in a row, we have seen an increase in usage among food banks throughout Newfoundland & Labrador. While last year's increase was modest at 3%, we have seen an increase of 10% this year. This trend is particularly disturbing given the fairly robust economy on the Eastern Avalon, which is driven by the oil and gas industry.

Employment still lags far behind the rest of Canada, according to the most recent Statistics Canada figures. We have been particularly hard hit by the recent recession, which has slowed down the growth and expansion of several oil sands projects in Alberta. Many of our fellow Newfoundlanders had been working out west and have found themselves being laid off and having to return back home.

Housing prices have continued to increase, which places a strain on those wishing to become first-time home owners. This, combined with speculative purchases of houses for the anticipated influx of workers on several megaprojects, is making it virtually impossible for low-income families to own a home.

Our fishery seems to be in a continual state of crisis. Problems within the shrimp fishery, combined with the extremely low price of lobster, has placed many fishers in a difficult financial situation. Though federal and provincial aid to these sectors is coming, many question the amount forthcoming and whether or not it addresses the real issues in the industry.

Our pulp and paper industry is in a state of disarray. We had previously seen the closure of the mill in Stephenville and, again this past year, the Abitibi Mill in Grand Falls closed its doors. This has had a tremendous effect on many families in the Central Newfoundland area. Our last remaining mill in Corner Brook on the west coast is experiencing shut downs, and requests by management for union concessions have been made.

We have been receiving regular shipments of products from Food Banks Canada to supplement our provincial collections of food items. These items are donated by major national manufacturers to Food Banks Canada, and are allocated to us based on our *HungerCount* figures. Donated transportation to Newfoundland and Labrador is provided by both Oceanex and CN Rail. Our total food acquisition and distribution this past year was \$16,050,000, which is on a par with previous years.

Food banks will continue to exist to help those who have been marginalized by society. It is our hope that one day all Canadians will be able to put their hand into their own pocket, take out their hard-earned cash, and choose and purchase the foods they want on their table.

Highlights

30,014 individuals were assisted, March 2009

+10% change since March 2008

37% are children

9% report employment income

14% receive Employment Insurance

71% receive social assistance

70% of food banks saw an increase

Reducing hunger in Canada

Food bank use is a stark indicator of the economic struggles many Canadians have faced this year, and of the struggles too many Canadians have been facing now for decades.

It is not, however, a perfect indicator of economic hardship – because for every person who makes the choice to turn to a food bank for help, several others do not. Food banks are not reaching all of the 2.7 million Canadians who will experience household food insecurity this year.⁴⁹

The persistent need for food banks, the stagnant or declining real incomes of the majority of Canadians, the decrease in the number of well-paying jobs – all of these issues are indicative of a changing reality in Canada. Economic change has brought continued prosperity to the nation overall, but not all Canadians are able to share in this prosperity.

The success of other nations in reducing the incidence of low income and hunger shows that Canada can do better. Significantly reducing hunger in Canada is a real possibility. **Let's make it a priority.**



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- 4 A "food bank" is defined as an organization that acquires and shares groceries – often referred to as grocery hampers – to households on, for example, a monthly, bi-monthly, or weekly basis. An "affiliated food program" or "affiliated agency" is defined as an organization that receives food from a food bank, which it then provides to its own clients. Affiliated food programs or agencies may offer grocery hampers, meals, and/or snacks to clients, and can include soup kitchens, child breakfast and lunch programs, shelters, drop-in centres, pre- and post-natal health and nutrition programs, etc. For ease of reading, throughout the report the term "food bank" will be taken to represent both food banks and affiliated food programs or agencies.
- 5 Figures were calculated using population estimates for January 2009. See Statistics Canada (2009). Canada's population estimates, first quarter 2009. *The Daily*, September 29, 2009.
- 6 Due to errors in *HungerCount* survey data collection from one of Quebec's 19 *Moissons* for the 2004-2008 survey periods, food bank use data for the period in question has been corrected. Corrected provincial food bank use totals for the month of March for Quebec are as follows: 2004 – 198,412; 2005 – 178,368; 2006 – 148,293; 2007 – 134,023; 2008 – 127,536. Corrected totals for Canada are as follows: 2004 – 803,335; 2005 – 786,968; 2006 – 744,055; 2007 – 703,051; 2008 – 675,735.
- 7 Based on surveys from 554 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
- 8 Based on surveys from 415 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs. A "new immigrant" is defined as a person who has immigrated to Canada in the last 10 years.
- 9 Based on surveys from 451 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
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Methodology

The primary purpose of the annual *HungerCount* survey is to provide a national snapshot of food bank use in Canada. This is accomplished by counting the total number of individuals who receive groceries from food banks and their affiliated agencies during the month of March. Each person is counted only once, regardless of the number of times that person receives assistance during the data collection period. March has been chosen as the study period because it is an unexceptional month, without predictable high or low use patterns. Since March is used consistently, we are able to make relevant comparisons in use patterns over time.

The survey also measures volunteer and paid staff hours contributed during the study period, frequency of food bank use allowed, days' worth of food provided, total number of prepared meals served, and coping strategies used when food banks risk running out of food. Demographic characteristics of those assisted by food banks, including primary income source, household composition, and housing type, were also measured in 2009.

Surveys were sent to all known Canadian food banks in February 2009. When necessary, *HungerCount* Provincial Coordinators contacted food banks prior to the submission deadline to clarify survey questions. Completed surveys were returned to Provincial Coordinators, who checked responses for accuracy

and completeness before forwarding copies to Food Banks Canada.

Throughout the summer, Food Banks Canada staff worked with *HungerCount* Provincial Coordinators to collect outstanding surveys and resolve any inconsistencies in responses. Survey data were entered into a database, checked for accuracy, and analyzed by Food Banks Canada staff and volunteers. In cases where actual grocery program figures were not available for operating food banks, conservative estimates were produced in consultation with Provincial Coordinators, using 2008 figures as a guide.

TABLE 3: Food Banks in Canada

Province/Territory	Known Food Banks	Participating Food Banks	% of Food Banks Participating	Agencies Included
British Columbia	95	83	87%	230
Alberta	102	82	80%	300
Saskatchewan	32	32	100%	174
Manitoba	53	51	96%	250
Ontario	342	282	82%	841
Quebec	19	19	100%	1,019
New Brunswick	58	57	98%	40
Nova Scotia	142	136	96%	0
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100%	5
Newfoundland & Labrador	28	28	100%	47
Territories	7	5	71%	0
Canada	884	781	88%	2,906

Acknowledgements

Food Banks Canada would like to thank the hundreds of food bank staff and volunteers who, every year, contribute essential information to the *HungerCount* report. Without their efforts this invaluable research would not be possible.

***HungerCount* 2009 Provincial Coordinators**

Heidi Gill, Abbotsford Community Services Food Bank (British Columbia)

Richard Le Sueur, Alberta Food Banks (Alberta)

Marjorie Bencz CM, Edmonton's Food Bank (Alberta)

Linda Robinson, ACERT, Regina and District Food Bank (Saskatchewan)

Karen Flett, Winnipeg Harvest Food Bank (Manitoba)

Nicola Cernik, Ontario Association of Food Banks (Ontario)

Richard Décarie, Banques alimentaires Québec (Quebec)

George Piers, Fredericton Community Kitchen (New Brunswick)

Julianne Acker-Verney, FEED NOVA SCOTIA (Nova Scotia)

Dianne Swinemar, FEED NOVA SCOTIA (Nova Scotia)

Eg Walters, Community Food Sharing Association (Newfoundland & Labrador)

Mike MacDonald, Upper Room Food Bank (Prince Edward Island)

Special thanks

Katharine Schmidt, Marzena Gersho, Dave Murray

Translation

Nadia Arhab-Tata, Hermes Translation Services

Editing, Design and Typesetting

Cheryl Carter, Wordslinger Inc.

Meredith MacKinlay, Egg Design

Jill Hansen, Hansen Design

***HungerCount* was prepared by**

Shawn Pegg and Alexandra Marie Baril

When referencing figures contained in *HungerCount 2009*, please attribute to: Food Banks Canada (2009). *HungerCount 2009*. Toronto: Food Banks Canada.

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ISBN: 978-0-9813632-2-6



2968 Dundas Street West,
Suite 303
Toronto, Ontario
M6P 1Y8
Tel: 416-203-9241
Toll-free: 1-877-535-0958
Fax: 416-203-9244
info@foodbankscanada.ca
www.foodbankscanada.ca

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