The cost of a healthy food basket on the island of Ireland
What is food poverty?

Part of the poverty experience

“The inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet” (Healthy Food for All)

Low income households most at risk!!
Extent of Food Poverty
Households Experiencing Food Poverty

Republic of Ireland: 13%
Northern Ireland: 8%

ROI - Department of Social Protection, 2015; NI Estimate - Health Survey NI, 2015
Why important

- Poor diet is a risk factor for many chronic diseases
  - Diet-related chronic diseases e.g. cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and diet-related cancers
  - Higher levels of obesity

- Social gradient – low income households most vulnerable
Food Budget

Food budget – a flexible part of the household expenditure

When the budget was tight there was a tendency to rely on a stockpile of frozen and package foods.

When sacrifices were required, there was a hierarchy of items that could be omitted from the shopping basket/trolley...

“Food is so cheap now; you keep buying more and putting it in the freezer”.
Two-parent family, Clondalkin

“Pizza from Iceland, they are only £1 and you can get a load of them – do them all week”.
Lone parent, Belfast

“It’s cheaper to buy a packet of burgers than it is to buy a packet of apples”.
Lone parent, Coolock

Establishing cost of food basket

Criteria

Realistic

Acceptable across a range of social classes

Nutritionally adequate

Approach

Consumer led with input from ‘experts’
Approach

‘Consensual Budget Standards’ (CBS) methodology

Initially developed in UK
Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ)
- applying approach in ROI since 2004
- to ascertain the level of income needed for an acceptable standard of living

Two part research:

1. Expenditure required for a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) which meets physical, psychological and social needs.

2. Income needed to afford the expenditure – Minimum Income Standard (MIS)

MESL is based on needs, not wants, it is a standard of living below which nobody should be expected to live.

This research focuses on food, 1 of 16 elements of MESL data.
Part 1 - Establishing the Expenditure

Consumer led research/Focus Groups

- Focus groups held for each household type
- Negotiated consensus on goods & services included in the baskets (approx. 2,000 items)
- Experts are consulted to ensure the negotiated consensus meets basic criteria e.g. nutritional standards
- Focus is on needs, not wants
Methodology

1. Orientation Phase
   - Negotiate consensus on purpose, terms, household type, etc
   - Homework – inventory of cupboards and food diary

2. Task Phase
   - Develop 7 day menus & identify shopping outlets – reach consensus
     (Healthy eating guidelines used as reference)

3. Cost Phase
   - Reach consensus menus plans, shopping lists, shopping outlets
   - Estimate food costs/ food items priced taking into consideration lifespan of foods items
   Expert input - Nutritionists review food baskets

4. Check Back Phase
   - Reach consensus on changes proposed by nutritionist and food budgets
   - Evaluation of process
Methodology

Low Income Scenarios

- Reliant on social welfare
- Earning Minimum Wage (1 adult)
Current Research

Republic of Ireland

MESL data already collected for 6 household types
- Rural and urban
- Across all 16 budget areas
- Contents of budget areas reviewed in 2012

This research mined the food basket data

Northern Ireland

Previous pilot costed revised English food basket – menus not developed from scratch

Applied Consensual Budget approach to costing the food basket only in NI for 2 most common household types
- 2 parent, 2 child (preschool & primary ages)
- Pensioner living alone
Republic of Ireland
Table 2: Sample menu – two parents and two children, one at primary and one at second level *Continued*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Mid-morning</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Mid-afternoon</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Evening snack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>2 x 30g bowl of Rice Krispies with 2 x 200ml of milk</td>
<td>4 x bananas</td>
<td>4 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread with cheese, turkey, 2 slices of tomato and a small portion of Flora</td>
<td>4 x medium oranges</td>
<td>4 x medium pork chops, 7 medium-sized baked potatoes (2 for each adult, 2 for 15-year-old boy, 1 for 10-year-old girl), portion of turnip and cauliflower with a small portion of gravy</td>
<td>4 x 2 plain biscuits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 x 30g bowl of cornflakes with 2 x 200ml of milk</td>
<td>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</td>
<td>4 x 2 slices of brown wholemeal bread with cheese, turkey, 2 slices of tomato and a small portion of Flora</td>
<td>2 slices of white bread, toasted, with a slice of cheese and a small portion of Flora (15-year-old)</td>
<td>4 x 200ml glasses of milk</td>
<td>30g bowl of cornflakes with 200 ml of milk (15-year-old)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 slices of bread, toasted, with a small portion of Flora and marmalade (2 brown per adult, 2 white for 15-year-old, 1 white for 10-year-old)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 x yoghurts (125g pot)</td>
<td>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</td>
<td>2 x 200ml glasses of diluted orange</td>
<td>2 x 200ml glasses of milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 x 200ml glasses of orange juice</td>
<td>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 x cups of tea/coffee with 35ml of milk</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 x cups of tea with 35ml of milk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social and cultural dimensions to food

Spending on ‘restaurants, cafes, fast food and take-away food’ and ‘Extra for Visitors’ was minimal e.g. take-away for families once a month

Essential for an acceptable minimal standard of living
# Key Objectives

For each household (rural and urban) establish

- Food budget as % of overall core expenditure*
- Food budget as % income (based on low income scenarios)
- Costs of different food groups e.g. meat, breads and cereals
- Food costs for children of different ages
- Trends from 2006-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single male living alone</th>
<th>Female pensioner</th>
<th>Pensioner couple</th>
<th>Lone parent &amp; two children (3 &amp; 10 years)</th>
<th>Two parent &amp; two children (3 &amp; 10 years)</th>
<th>Two parent &amp; two children (10 &amp; 15 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

* Household expenditure excluding housing and childcare.
Findings – Cost (Euros and % Core Expenditure)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Urban Total Cost (€)</th>
<th>Rural Total Cost (€)</th>
<th>Urban % Core expenditure</th>
<th>Rural % Core expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two parent &amp; two children (3y &amp; 10y)</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent &amp; two children (10y &amp; 15y)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One parent and two children (3y &amp; 10y)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single adult male of working age living alone</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner couple</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female pensioner living alone</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rural costs higher – more shopping in local stores and additional transport costs
Findings – Average food spend on different foods categories

Food spend on key food categories in urban households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Spend</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breads &amp; Cereals</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits &amp; Vegetables</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td></td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk, Cheese &amp; Eggs</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 safefood
Findings – Cost of Child

Weekly food costs (€) for a child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of child</th>
<th>Urban €</th>
<th>Rural €</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school (3y)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School (10y)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Primary (15y)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Significant cost for all households with children, particularly those with an adolescent child.
- The cost of feeding a teenager was double the cost that of feeding a pre-schooler and €12–13/wk more expensive than for a primary school child.
- The costs were higher for those living in rural areas.
Findings - % Income

Table 2. Food basket costs per household as proportion (%) household income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Social welfare</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent &amp; two children (3y &amp; 10y)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent &amp; two children (10y &amp; 15y)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One parent and two children (3y &amp; 10y)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single adult male of working age living alone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Non contributory pension</th>
<th>Contributory pension (&amp; qualified adult payment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner couple</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female pensioner living alone</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inflation – food costs 2.4% more in 2014 compared to 2006

Trend data available in main report for 6 household types
Change in cost of food

ROI - between 2006 and 2014

- Food and non-alcoholic beverage prices rose 2.4% from 2006 – 2014. (10% in 2008)
- Fruit and vegetables were cheaper in 2014, than in 2006. (Highest in 2008).
- Other food categories were more expensive in 2014, than in 2006. (Breads and cereals; milk, cheese and eggs; oils and fats).
- The overall proportion of household incomes required for a nutritionally adequate food basket remained the same from 2011 - 2014.
Northern Ireland
Objectives

- Using the consensual budget standards methodology to construct a food basket for 2 household types
  
  2 parent, 2 child (2-4y old and 6-11y old)
  
  Pensioner living alone

- Examine spending on food as proportion of household income
## Extract for pensioner menu

### Figure 3: Final seven-day menu for pensioner household - pensioner living alone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Mid-morning</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Mid-afternoon</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Evening snack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mon | 2 Weetabix with semi-skimmed milk
1 piece of fruit, banana
Cup of tea | Cup of coffee and 1 piece of fruit, orange | Ham, cheese, cucumber, lettuce and tomato sandwich
1 glass of water and cup of tea
1 low-fat yogurt | Cup of coffee | Chicken curry (chicken left over from Sunday lunch) and rice with mushrooms, frozen peas, peppers and onion, garlic
1 glass of water | Hot chocolate/cocoa |
| Tue | Bowl of porridge
1 piece of fruit, apple
Cup of tea | Cup coffee and 2 digestive biscuits | Beans on two slices of toast
1 glass of water and cup of tea
1 low-fat yogurt | Cup of coffee | Pork chops grilled (2 small chops or 1 large chop) with apple sauce (homemade), 2 potatoes (mashed), carrots and cabbage
1 glass of water | Hot chocolate/cocoa and 2 plain digestive biscuits |
| Wed | 2 Weetabix with semi-skimmed milk,
piece of fruit, 1/2 grapefruit
Cup of tea | Cup of coffee and 1 piece of fruit, banana | Ham & cheese toastie with tomato and lettuce
1 glass of water and 1 cup of tea
1 low-fat yogurt | Cup of coffee | Beef stew with beef stock, stewing steak, onions, garlic, potatoes, carrots, leeks and celery
1 glass of water | Hot chocolate/cocoa and 2 plain digestive biscuits |
### Extras – social and culture needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 parent, 2 child Household</th>
<th>Pensioner Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• £8.49 Alcohol</td>
<td>£3.99 Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• £5 Takeaway (once a month)</td>
<td>£10 Visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• £1.15 for Christmas</td>
<td>£3 take-away (once a fortnight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• £5.83 for school food</td>
<td>£3.75 Eating out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£0.49 Christmas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The cost of a healthy food basket in Northern Ireland

Total cost of food basket per household type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household type</th>
<th>Total cost of food basket</th>
<th>Take-home income</th>
<th>Proportion of take-home income (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner living alone on State Pension</td>
<td>£59</td>
<td>£164</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent, two-child household on Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
<td>£119</td>
<td>£338</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent, two-child household on minimum wage</td>
<td>£119</td>
<td>£415</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Findings

% spend on key food categories by the two household types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food type</th>
<th>Percentage of basket cost for pensioner living alone</th>
<th>Percentage of basket cost for two-parent, two-child household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits and vegetables (including potatoes)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk, cheese, eggs</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breads and cereals</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Findings

Northern Ireland

• The two low-income households spent approximately 1/3 of their take-home income on this food basket.

• The cost of the food basket for the single-person household was comparatively high.

• The social and cultural aspect of food was reinforced by the inclusion of additional items (eating out and providing for visitors).

• Focus groups confirmed the flexible nature of the household’s food budget.

• This research should be extended to other household types & updated annually to inform policy & practice in the area of food-related inequalities.
Implications of this research
Media success

Print Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Headline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belfast Telegraph</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>Basket of healthy food costs low income families a third of a weekly budget: report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Telegraph</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>Basket of healthy food costs low income families a third of a weekly budget: report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Letter</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>Revealed...true cost of healthy eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast Telegraph</td>
<td>10/06/15</td>
<td>After a new report revealed how much some of the poorest people in Northern Ireland need to spend on food to eat healthily, we find out how two mums feed their families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Broadcast Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBC Radio Ulster – Good Morning Ulster</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>Ann Watson, Philippa McKeown Brown and Sharon Gilmore interview</td>
<td>8mins 32secs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U105 – Frank Mitchell</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>Dr Ciadhna Foley Nolan interview</td>
<td>6mins 24secs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citybeat News</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>News Bulletin: Cost of healthy eating</td>
<td>40secs x5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q Radio Network News</td>
<td>09/06/15</td>
<td>News Bulletin: Cost of healthy eating</td>
<td>40secs x5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key evidence

LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WOULD HAVE TO SPEND $\frac{1}{3}$ OF THEIR TAKE-HOME INCOME ON A HEALTHY FOOD BASKET
Future work

ROI

Update cost of healthy food basket every two years in line with the core MESL work by VPSJ

NI

Extend the pilot to 2 other households
- Lone parent, 2 child (pre-school and primary school age)
- 2 parent, 2 child (primary and post-primary age)

Update data on household types every 2 years
Future work
Food Poverty Puzzle
A three-stage investigation into the balance of healthy versus less healthy food promotions among Northern Ireland food retailers.

Food Poverty Network

Understanding Food in the Context of Poverty, Economic Insecurity and Social Exclusion

Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022
Only the start of the road
Thanks

Any questions?

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