



# *A Portrait of the Food Industry Relating To Residents of the Lower North Shore*

*“A Healthy Alternative Lifestyle”*

(January 2005 to March 2007)

## **Overview of Project**

The project entitled “A Portrait of the Food Industry relating to residents of the Lower North Shore” is sponsored by Health Canada under the Population Health Fund. The Coasters Association, Health Canada and its partners have joined forces to increase collaboration, communication and information concerning food security aimed at developing an *“A Healthy Alternative Lifestyle”* for the residents of the Lower North Shore. The partners have been looking at ways to ensure that citizens on the Lower North Shore have access to affordable, safe, and nutritious foods, as well as promoting education on healthy eating habits, making good food choices and the benefits of being active. Thus, a greater understanding of the different avenues to increase the accessibility of nutritional food and educating the population on making healthy lifestyle choices is necessary if there is to be any change in the health status of the Lower North Shore population.

### **Partnerships**

Partnership is one of the most important aspects of the Coasters Association. It is a link for communication, finding a common ground and a successful model of shared resources. We have established strong partnerships with many organizations, institutions and municipalities on & off the Lower North Shore.

A key partner of this initiative were the members of the Lower North Shore Coalition for Health, their commitment to the project was immeasurable. The Coalition is comprised of dedicated people who supported this program and played a major role in its accomplishments of which they are very proud; Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux de la Basse-Côte-Nord (CSSSBCN), Council of Mayors (CM), Local Development Center (LDC), Quebec Labrador Foundation (QLF), and Commission Scolaire du Littoral (CSL).

As the project progressed, we acquired many new partners and community volunteers. (To many to name) In the spirit of teamwork, all our partners have contributed significantly to developing and initiating programs and services within all the communities along the Lower North Shore, and for this we are very grateful.

The project was a major success; however, without the support and guidance of Health Canada, none of this would have been possible. Their assistance has been crucial in helping to aid and build sustainable long-term development for the communities of the Lower North Shore of Quebec.

## **Research & Development**

### **Establishing a profile**

To understand the needs, concerns and find possible solutions to encourage healthier eating habits of the residents of the Lower North Shore, many avenues were explored. A Household Survey was carried out with consumers on their food consumption and purchasing habits. A Food Retailers Survey was conducted with store owners concerning the means, the cost and quality of food transported to the Lower North Shore. Healthy and Less Healthy Food Baskets were also calculated to determine if it is expensive to eat healthy on the Lower North Shore. Furthermore, both Healthy and Less Healthy Food Baskets were also calculated for the Québec City region, to demonstrate the difference in cost for a Food Basket on the Lower North Shore (isolated rural area) as opposed to one from an urban area (Québec City). Reports have been produced with all the data collected.

### **Food Transportation Consultation**

The Consultation concerning Food Transportation was held on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006. This event pulled together key players, who can assist in finding solutions to increasing the access to affordable, safe and nutritious foods to consumers on the Lower North Shore, since a greater understanding of the different avenues to increase the accessibility of nutritional food is necessary if there is to be any change in the cost, quality and quantity of food purchased on the Lower North Shore. Work is in progress to find possible solutions for increasing the accessibility of nutritional food on the Lower North Shore. (i.e. a steering committee). All the businesses on the Lower North Shore will be contacted to see if, when and how this steering committee will be formed. This Steering Committee will continue working on the issue of Food Transportation in order to find solutions. It is important to note that Luc Ladouceur of the Food Mail Program, Indian and Northern Affairs, attended the consultation to explain how the program could benefit this region. It is important to note that some of the retail stores in the region already used or are using this program, but 90 % of the store owners did not clearly understand the service.

## **Exploring Different Avenues**

### **Community Kitchens**

In 2006, four (4) groups were formed, two (2) in the west, one (1) in the middle and one (1) in the East) and a leader was chosen for each group. Regroupement des Cuisines Collectives du Québec was approached and on October 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Diane Roberge of Regroupement *des Cuisines Collectives du Québec (RCCQ)* provided a two-day formation on how to operate and maintain a community kitchen. Attending the formation were a few partners, interested citizens and potential leaders for the kitchen groups.

Binders were created for the leaders and the participants. Jocelyne Jones, Nutritionist, traveled to the west and middle sectors to meet the groups and assisted them with their first community kitchen planning and cooking session. The groups have been meeting once or twice a month depending on their needs. Positive feedback is being received from all those who are participating. It is also interesting to note that another Community Kitchen in the community of Lourdes de Blanc Sablon (some of its members took the

formation) was also developed outside this project. However, due to housing problems, and the absentness of several group members, the Kitchen group in Harrington Harbour decided to discontinue.

### **Community Gardens**

Three (3) community gardens have been put in place. The communities of Old Fort Bay, Chevery and La Tabatiere were chosen for the Implementation of “Community Gardens”. Each community approached their garden set-up a little differently. There were approximately fifty-five (55) participants, with a large group of them being seniors, as well as volunteers who assisted in the organizing of the groups.

**Old Fort Bay’s** group (20 participants), consisted of a majority of seniors, thus getting to a garden site, with exodus of the majority of younger people in the community to provide transportation, proved to be a challenge. However, it was decided to place ten (10) garden boxes near their homes for easy access. It was a huge success and all those involved enjoyed their little gardens. For some it was the first time they ever done gardening and for others it was the first time in a long time.

During the spring the community of **La Tabatière** started its gardens. Seven (7) plots were cleared and worked, as some people (15 participants) chose to work together with members of their family. The participants had a lot of fun working as a group and wondered if their gardens would grow and develop into anything resembling a garden, being that they had a late start. After about three weeks they were quite pleased and surprised to see how well it was growing. Later, some of the groups made fences while others piled rocks around and laid boards to keep the soil from washing away.

In the community of **Chevery** twenty (20) people came together to help create the Chevery Caring & Sharing Community Garden (CSCG). The project got off to a great start with children from the community creating posters to invite the public to an initial information meeting. The CSCG Committee decided that given the short time frame a container garden model would be used for the 2006 season. Several committee members already had experience in using garden boxes, fish baskets and other types of containers in their own gardens, which provided a solid foundation of knowledge for the group. In the spirit of sharing and learning, the committee also decided to create a shared community garden, meaning the garden management and produce grown would be shared equally among all participants.

Each garden group enlisted volunteers to assist them as needed. All the gardens grew well and surpassed what the participants expected for their first season.

### **School Nutrition Courses and Cooking Classes**

This program was implemented in the two high schools in the east sector (St. Paul’s School, MGR Scheffer School) by the Centre de Santé sociaux service de la Basse Côte Nord (CSSSBCN). In 2006 the program was implemented in the remaining three high schools (St. Augustine School, Mecatina School, Natagamiou School) by the Coasters Association. The project nutritionist met with the nutritionist of CSSSBCN to discuss certain aspects of the project and to make adjustment to the material created for the program. During the duration of this project CSSSBCN was responsible for the East Sector (two schools); the project nutritionist was responsible for the schools in the

Middle Sector and West Sector (three schools) of the coast. All the principals were contacted to rearrange school schedules to accommodate the classes. All agreed. Materials to create the binders were updated, and cookbooks were created for the teachers and the students. A lot of community support was received and following the implementation of the courses and classes, positive feed back was received from the schools and the community, thus, awareness has been created with the students and the community on the importance of eating and cooking healthy.

### **Meals-On-Wheels**

The community of Tête à la Baleine was designated as a possible community for the implementation of a Meal-on-Wheels program; however, since a group called “Atelier des Aînés”, is also working on developing senior initiatives in this Community, and they felt that the community wasn’t ready for the implementation process; another community was suggested for review. While visiting the community of Chevery the Coordinator and Nutritionist had the opportunity to tour the Meals-on-Wheels set-up in the community. After discussion with the coordinator of the Meals-on-Wheels in Chevery, it was noted that there was not enough money in the budget to start a meals-on-wheels program and that it is very costly to implement. However, the possibility of using the existing Meals-on-Wheels to extend its services to other communities was explored.

The Coordinator and Nutritionist participated in a working group, organized by Darlene Rowsell of CSSSBCN, to discuss a plan of action for the implementation of a possible spin-off Meals-on-Wheels to the neighboring community of Harrington Harbour. It was felt that it was important that a study be done to ascertain the needs of the community before any implementation is done. Partnerships were formed with the local municipality to assist with implementation and the carrying out of the study in Harrington Harbour to obtain the needs of the community and the seniors. These results will now guide the working group and the municipality in developing a plan of action for this community.

## **Planning**

### **Planning and Preparing**

Meetings were usually held once a month to update and inform the partners on the progression of the project, address any concerns and to finalize decisions. The framework developed was to follow the work plan and respond to the needs of the population which emanated from focus group meetings as well as workshops held in each community. A partnership forum will take place in Chevery on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, to create a long-term action plan with old and new partners.

### **General Evaluation**

The services of an Evaluation Firm have been established with Qu’anglo Communications & Consulting, and an excellent working relationship with the evaluation firm has been created and they are kept informed and updated on all stages of the project. They also assist when needed to ensure that the objectives are being met. The evaluation firm is constantly quantifying and qualifying to ensure that the objectives of the project are being realized.

## **Communication**

### **Draft Action plan for partners**

The compilation of material for the creation of a long-term action plan with commitments from partners, interested institutions and organizations, will be finalized at the end of the project. This action plan will be distributed to all partners, interested institutions and organizations, and a summary available for general population.

### **Newsletters (Health Matters)**

Two (2) newsletters were prepared on the project and healthy eating and disseminated to every household on the Lower North Shore. The third newsletter (Health Matters) will be disbursed to the population in early April.

## **Outreach**

### **Awareness and Promotion**

The development of a Lower North Shore Nutritional /Food guide started earlier than projected. A local artist, Lori Lee Thomas, was approached to designing the cover page and all the artwork required. This guide has been produced with Canada's Food Guide's new changes in mind. The cover page has been reviewed many times by the partners and other resources and the necessary changes made. As well, local resources have been identified and their nutritional value assessed. The material developed were the Lower North Shore Food Guide, nutritional guide (booklet), cookbook, booklet on the nutrients found in different food sources on local resources, and an inside context booklet. The Lower North Shore food guide has been completed printed and will be launched on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, in Chevery, Quebec.

### **School Contests**

To obtain healthy local recipes, the youth participated with their parents, thus creating awareness to healthy cooking with both target groups. A contest was developed and implemented (fall of 2005) in all schools and communities along the Lower North Shore.

All schools (12) and communities (14) participated along the Lower North Shore. Free promotional material was obtained from other organizations (Heart and Stroke Foundation, Quebec Home and School Federation, etc..) as free gifts for the healthy recipe contest, as well as promotional material developed specifically for this project.

To further promote the contest, each principal and school were contacted to ensure participation of the staff and the students. Posters were created and placed in the schools and in public places within the communities. The winning recipes was chosen and tested, to ensure quality and taste, as well as nutritional content, by Jocelyne Jones, nutritionist, Coasters Association and Rejeanne Macroux, nutritionist, CSSSBCN. The winning local recipes were placed in the cookbook. Recipes were also gathered from the seniors at the long-term care units at the Dr. Hodd Pavilion in Harrington Harbour and the in Lourdes du Blanc Sablon.

To promote an awareness campaign, a second contest has been implemented in partnership with the nutritionist at the CSSSBCN. Twelve (12) schools, (40% 312

participants) along the Lower North Shore participated. This contest was aimed at kindergarten and elementary students only.

In the fall of 2006 and through the winter of 2007 contests were once again developed and implemented in the schools, to create awareness around healthy eating.

## **Education, Prevention and Empowerment**

### **Workshops**

In order to promote healthy eating, and to meet the needs of the population as requested during focus group meetings held in each community along the Lower North Shore, three (3) workshop were given during the duration of the project in all communities of the Lower North Shore. The following were the workshops given, *“Weight Management and Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating”*, *“Make Wise Food Choices, Wherever you go, and How to read food labels”*, and *“Fats”* have all been designed to create awareness, and provide education, etc., to targeted groups (seniors, women, children, etc.)

### **Focus Group Sessions**

Focus group sessions were held in all communities (14) along the Lower North Shore. During the focus group sessions participants were asked what would enable their communities to become a healthier one, which nutritional program would better answer the needs of their community, (i.e., community kitchens, community gardens, meals-on-wheels, nutrition support groups, exercise support groups, workshops) and which local resource best represented their community. Gathered needs and concerns of the population through focus group meetings, 5% (overall) of the population participated (14 communities). Needs and concerns were also taken by telephone; some interested persons were unable to participate in person.

### **Nutrition Month**

Due to March being nutrition month, several articles on nutrition were prepared and disseminated to all communities along the Lower North Shore.

In March 2005, school packages were prepared for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes (an activity on healthy foods) and sent to all fourteen (14) schools on the Lower North Shore (English and French). Feed back was positive while helping to create awareness with this group. An information sheet on “Go the Healthy Way, Eat Well, Live Well, and Feel Great” was created and disbursed on the Lower North Shore.

In honour of 2006 Nutrition Month, an article was written and disseminated in the newsletter, “Health Matters”, and placed in the newspaper “Coastar”.

For 2007, a workshop on “Fats” was given in all Municipalities. The Coasters Association’s nutritionist in collaboration with the nutritionist at CSSSBCN to held healthy activities in local stores, (i.e., presentation on fruits and vegetables and the testing of different healthy recipes).

### **Promotional Tools**

Promotional materials and healthy food posters were ordered to be placed in schools and local stores. Items were received and distributed.

### **Public Health Agency of Canada**

The Public Health Agency of Canada offered a formation-exchange of information for two (2) days in April 2006, in Montreal. The Coordinator, Nutritionist and one of the partners (CSSSBCN) attended. The meetings were successful, and connections were made with other groups working under the same program.

Lina Racine and Marie-Josée Denis, Program Officers, Health Canada visited the office to meet and discuss the project.

Two representatives from the Coasters Association also attended a food security conference in Vancouver, pertinent information was gathered to assist and aid in the project.

### **Publicity**

Local interviews were done with local media, as well as CHSSN to explain the project and to create awareness. Since the beginning of the project many announcements were forwarded to the radio stations to inform them of the project and upcoming events, thus keeping the public informed.

### **Development (Long Term)**

Research on different initiatives is on-going, for the continuation of these initiatives and for long term development and sustainability (i.e., green house, local resources, gardens, composting, recycling, exercise programs, nutritional information, senior programs, home and school programs, etc.)

Research on a Coastal Green house is still on going. A project was submitted to Canada Economic Development (DEC), however, they did not fund the greenhouse project as submitted, they required that a coop-op be established, thus contact was made with Coopérative de Développement Régional Bas-Saint-Laurent/Côte-Nord (CDR), to plan the next stage regarding co-ops, etc. Several meetings were held with the Société d'aide au développement des collectivités de la Côte-Nord inc. (SADC) and Coopérative de Développement Régional Bas-Saint-Laurent/Côte-Nord (CDR) to discuss the creation of Cooperatives. At this moment this file is on hold, although interest has been shown for this development in the Municipality of Gros Mecatina. There will be a follow-up to this file in the next year. It is also important to note that the Merchants were responsive to alternative methods of supply (purchasing from a local green house, purchasing co-op).

Another possible business venture is the development of local resources (wild berries). A committee has been formed and many partnerships created regarding the developing of this industry on the Lower North Shore. This file is very active, and progress is already being made and a project proposal has been submitted to Economic Development Canada (DEC). Many important partnerships, such as the Institut de Technologie Agroalimentaire, Société d'aide au développement des collectivités de la Côte-Nord Inc. (SADC), Coopérative de Développement Régional Bas-Saint-Laurent/Côte-Nord (CDR),

Local Development Center (LDC), Council of Mayors (CM), and Quebec Labrador Foundation (QLF), assisted with this file.

## **Results**

The objectives of the project were to engage the population of the Lower North Shore in working towards a healthy alternative lifestyle. This has been carried out through research, needs assessments, consultations, education and awareness programs, and the establishment of direct activities, such as community kitchens/ community gardens in the communities. This has all been accomplished despite the challenge that most of the Lower North Shore communities (14) are not connected by road, and trying to implement any initiative in the middle and west sectors has proven to be difficult, due to the high cost of transportation and the complexity of getting to and from communities during certain seasons (i.e. snowmobile and plane during winter months, helicopter during spring break-up and fall freeze-up, and ship and plane during the summer) on the Lower North Shore.

This has, however, reinforced the need to improve transportation services in the area, if not for the otherwise simple exercise of organizing workshops and meetings, then for the improved capability to deliver quality foodstuff year-round.

The Transportation Consultation was a milestone in the development of the Lower North Shore as it brought together many of the commercial stakeholders of the region to help address an issue with important social implications. While there is clearly a long way to go before declaring that such a roundtable has been permanently established and a comprehensive and collaborative program to resolve all food supply and quality issues has been started, it is important to note that all participants expressed a desire to continue the development process and recognized that despite their different roles within the socio-economic fabric of the region, they all had something to gain from working together to improve the food transportation situation on the Lower North Shore.

Thus far it has been established that providing education and creating awareness for the population was severely needed, and that this is not a situation that can be rectified in a few short months. It is important to understand that a healthy lifestyle/healthy eating are all about personal choices, however, the population is in need of educational advice and continual support which this project has started to provide through its different outreach activities.

A longer-term program will be essential, and the development of such an initiative, particularly directed at the younger generation, will be part of the focus in the second part of the project. Due to the isolation factor, services to offer such an on-going program in small remote communities are limited or nonexistent. Other means of reaching the population must be looked at (i.e., monthly video conferencing with Community Kitchen Groups to update and review the progress of the group, have selected groups hold sessions with nutritionist, etc.), thus encouraging, supporting, and providing continual advice and information to the population.

A one-year extension (April 2007 to March 2008) of the project for the development of long-term initiatives through the creation of new businesses (i.e. green house, composting, recycling, wildflower production, canning, freezing and drying), and follow-up to the community gardens, community kitchens, in-school nutritional courses and the implementation of new ones, has been requested and there is a strong possibility of it being accepted.

A Portrait of the Food Industry Relating to Residents of the Lower North Shore (A Healthy Alternative Lifestyle) has been a very successful initiative, therefore, another phase for a duration of three years (April 2008 to March 2011) is crucial to the implementation, continuation and promotion of these much-needed programs and services, such as exercise, diabetics, cancer, nutrition, senior activities, public awareness, in school activities, etc. We hope to continue to work with all those who can help make a difference in the health and wellbeing of the people of the fourteen (14) isolated communities of the Lower North Shore.

Priscilla Fequet Griffin, Coordinator  
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