

## **FEED NOVA SCOTIA presents a comparative snapshot of hunger in Nova Scotia**

Submitted by: FEED NOVA SCOTIA, Member of Food Banks Canada

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HungerCount 2011 results for Nova Scotia reflect survey responses from 97 FEED NOVA SCOTIA member and non member agency food banks.<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, results presented here are based on counting individuals and households only once, no matter how many times they were assisted by individual food banks during March of each year.

### **Fast Facts:**

Number of Nova Scotians assisted by food banks in March, 2011, counting each only once no matter how many times they were assisted: 22,505

Percentage that were children under the age of 18: 32%

Variance change at a glance:

- 0.3% decrease compared to March, 2010
- 33% increase compared to March, 2008

### **Overview**

There has been a very slight (0.30%) decrease in the overall number of individuals in Nova Scotia receiving assistance from food banks compared to March 2010, but this should by no means be interpreted as a good news story. While on the whole the numbers were down, not all regions throughout the province<sup>2</sup> reported a dip in the number of individuals receiving food assistance; in fact some saw an increase. This reaffirms the continued need for flexible public policy and social programs that address the economic challenges unique to each geographic region. Nova Scotians relying on assistance from food banks are affected by a variety of issues including provincial and regional economic pressures; temporary and permanent business shut downs; and increasing food, fuel and electricity costs. Our purpose in presenting the findings of HungerCount 2011 is not to speculate on why the numbers have decreased or increased, but to inform discussion and stimulate further conversation.

Findings of HungerCount 2011 for Nova Scotia are presented in comparison to those of 2010, 2009 and 2008. Responses to this year's survey highlight the diversity within the province as we saw significant regional differences in relation to the increase or decrease in the number of people supported by food banks. Five of FEED NOVA SCOTIA's six regions have experienced an increase in the number of people assisted in 2011 compared to the 2008 pre-recession HungerCount results, varying from an increase of 17% in Antigonish-Pictou-Guysborough, to a staggering 63% in the Valley-Yarmouth Region. Provincially, there has been a 33% increase in the number of individuals assisted by food banks in March 2011, compared to March 2008.

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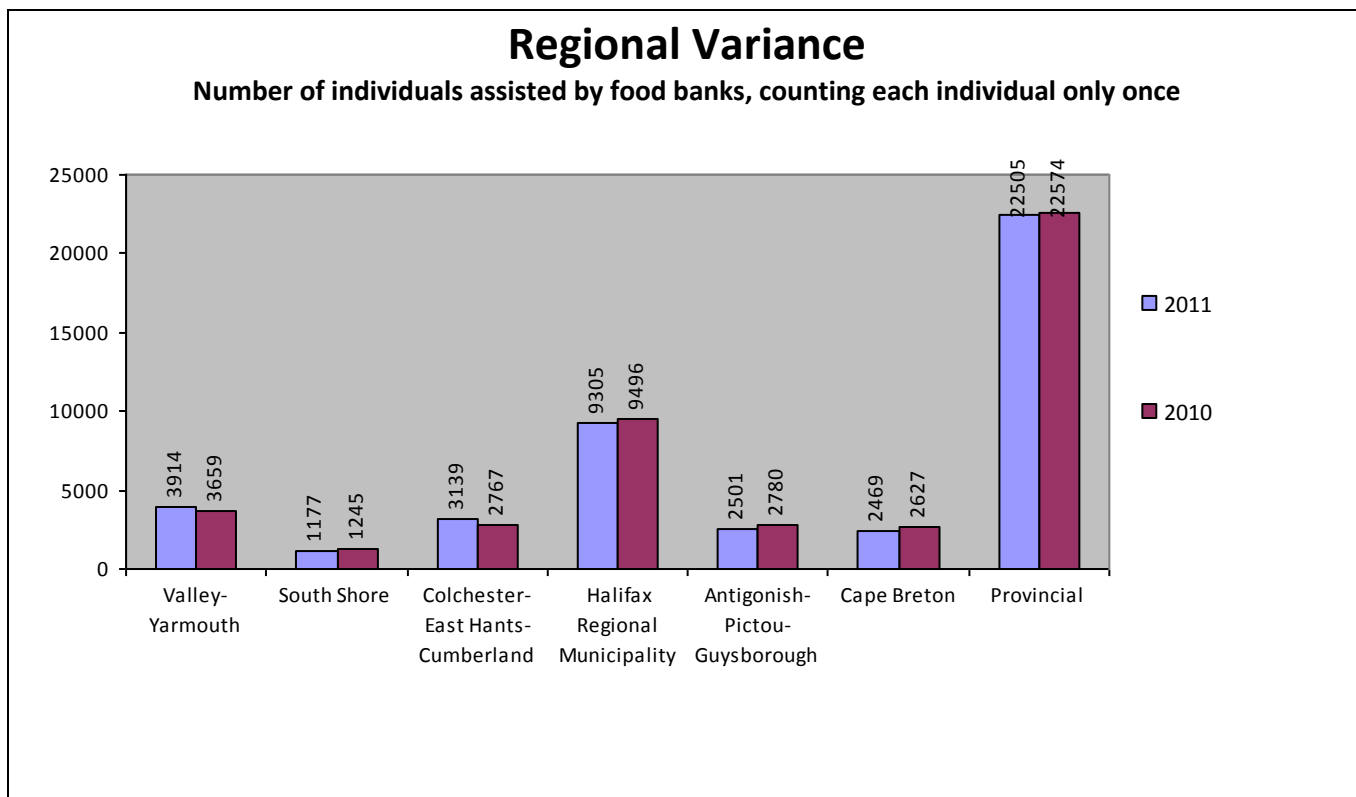
<sup>1</sup> The annual HungerCount survey collects additional information including the number of meals and snacks served each March. Additional findings stemming from the HungerCount 2011 survey in Nova Scotia will be presented as they become available.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this report, FEED NOVA SCOTIA analyzes statistical data on the basis of six mutually exclusive regions: Valley-Yarmouth, South Shore, Colchester-East Hants-Cumberland, Halifax Regional Municipality, Antigonish-Pictou-Guysborough and Cape Breton.

There is optimism that the national and provincial economy is on the upswing, but we also hear cautionary messages that we may find ourselves in another phase of economic contraction as Canada feels the effect of a struggling US economy hindered by government debt, continued housing market woes and decreased consumer confidence. Consumers brace for increased demands on their finances as large companies such as Kimberly-Clark warn of increased pricing on items including diapers and baby and youth care products during the third and fourth quarters of 2011. At the time of writing, Nova Scotians are celebrating the \$25 billion contract awarded to a Halifax based shipyard. Food banks and agencies that support vulnerable people share the enthusiasm for the employment opportunities, increased confidence and other benefits this decision will bring to the region. However, there is a responsibility associated with this type of economic growth: statistics illustrate that strong economies do not benefit everyone equally and we know that many people living in poverty (ie. Seniors and persons with significant or multiple disabilities) cannot, and will never be able to, participate in the labor force through no fault of their own. We must carefully and thoughtfully prepare for the future to ensure all Nova Scotians share the benefits of this incredible opportunity for economic security and stability within the province.

### Regional Variation

Though the number of Nova Scotians receiving food assistance in March 2011 has decreased slightly from March 2010, on the whole the table below illustrates that this is not true for each of the six regions. In fact, there has been an increase in two regions this year. The Valley-Yarmouth region has experienced a 7% increase and the Colchester-East Hants-Cumberland region experienced a 13% increase over March 2010.



**Valley-Yarmouth** region has experienced an increase in the number of individuals assisted by food banks during March for three consecutive years as evidenced by responses to the four HungerCount surveys (2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011) as shown below. There has been a staggering 63% increase in the number of individuals assisted in March 2011, compared to pre-recession 2008 and a 28% increase in 2011 compared to 2009. While the year-over-year increase in actual figures has lessened from 2008 to 2010, the troubling fact is that in the Valley-Yarmouth region 1,516 additional people were assisted by food banks in March 2011 than in March 2008.

**Colchester-East Hants-Cumberland** region is the second of two regions that experienced an increase in emergency food assistance provision in March 2011, compared to March 2010, after showing a 4% decrease in March 2010 compared to March 2009. Overall, this region has experienced a 40% increase in the number of separate individuals assisted by food banks since March 2008.

**South Shore** is one of four regions showing a decrease in the number of individuals assisted in March 2011 compared to March 2010 at 5%. This year's decrease is on the heels of a 10% increase in March 2010 compared to March 2009 and a 19% increase in March 2009 compared to March 2008. In 2011, the South Shore region shows a 24% increase compared to March 2008 pre-recession figures.

**Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)** figures show a 2% decrease in 2011 compared to 2010, the smallest decrease of the four regions. This is in contrast to the yearly increases experienced in 2009 and 2010. Overall, there has been a 39% increase in the number of people assisted by HRM food banks in March 2011, compared to March 2008.

Of the four regions experiencing a decrease in the amount of people assisted in March 2011 compared to March 2010, Antigonish-Pictou-Guysborough shows the greatest decrease at 10%. However, there has been a 17% increase compared to March 2008.

**Cape Breton Region** also experienced a decrease in March 2011 compared to March 2010. As a matter of fact, March 2011 results show that fewer people were assisted by food banks this year than in 2010, 2009 or 2008. Cape Breton is anomaly among the six provincial regions: it is the only region showing a decrease in the number of people assisted comparing March 2011 to March 2008 (0.12%). There were, however, year-over-year increases when comparing 2009 to 2008 and 2010 to 2009.

Change in number of individuals assisted by Nova Scotia food banks as reported to HungerCount 2008 - 2011										
Region	Total individuals served once, HCS 2011	Total individuals served once, HCS 2010	Total individuals served once, HCS 2009	Total individuals served once, HCS 2008	2011- 2010 variance %	2011- 2009 variance %	2011- 2008 variance %	2010- 2009 variance %	2010- 2008 variance %	2009- 2008 variance %
Valley-Yarmouth	3914	3659	3054	2398	7.0%	28.2%	63.2%	19.8%	52.6%	27.4%
South Shore	1177	1245	1134	952	-5.5%	3.8%	23.6%	9.8%	30.8%	19.1%
Colchester-East Hants-Cumberland	3139	2767	2883	2235	13.4%	8.9%	40.4%	-4.0%	23.8%	29.0%
Halifax Regional Municipality	9305	9496	8431	6713	-2.0%	10.4%	38.6%	12.6%	41.5%	25.6%
Antigonish-Pictou-Guysborough	2501	2780	2308	2145	-10.0%	8.4%	16.6%	20.5%	29.6%	7.6%
Cape Breton	2469	2627	2535	2472	-6.0%	-2.6%	-0.1%	3.6%	6.3%	2.5%
<b>Provincial</b>	<b>22505</b>	<b>22574</b>	<b>20345</b>	<b>16915</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>10.6%</b>	<b>33.0%</b>	<b>11.0%</b>	<b>33.5%</b>	<b>20.3%</b>

While Nova Scotia as a whole shows a small decrease in the number of individuals assisted by food banks in March 2011 compared to March 2010, the same is not true for every region in the province. Moreover, regional differences in the increase and decrease in the number of individuals assisted by food banks are further emphasized when comparing this year's results with those of 2008. As a result, FEED NOVA SCOTIA does not consider this year's small decrease—in isolation of other factors—as an indicator of advancement in our collective fight to end poverty and hunger in our province. While 2009 was the first year to show an increase in assistance provided by Nova Scotia food banks after four consecutive years of decrease, further analysis of HungerCount and other data is required to understand the trends in food bank use experienced by Nova Scotia through periods of economic growth and contraction. We present this information to generate discussion and further questions which will contribute to the understanding necessary to rid Nova Scotia of hunger and poverty.

The existence (or absence) of relevant public policy plays a vital role in the fight against poverty and hunger. Nova Scotians struggling to keep a roof over their heads and food on their tables would benefit from national affordable housing and poverty reduction strategies. While on the political agenda to some degree in 2010 (evidenced by bills before the House of Commons), neither affordable housing nor poverty reduction bills were successfully passed through Parliament before the May 2011 federal election. We are pleased that Bill C-233, an act to eliminate poverty, has been introduced to the newly-elected members of Parliament by Jean Crowder of the New Democratic Party.

On the provincial level, there is new optimism for Nova Scotia's economy and a sense of promise for improvement in the lives of all Nova Scotians in the wake of the Halifax-based Irving Shipyard being awarded the \$25 billion contract to replace combat ships. FEED NOVA SCOTIA calls on Nova Scotians and all Canadians to make poverty and hunger priority issues for elected political officials as we venture into an economic period unlike any other in Nova Scotia's history. We all have a role to play, we all have a responsibility and we all have a voice that can make a difference—and the time is now.