

## Appendix A: Speech by Senator Trenholme Counsell MD

**NB Food Security Action Network  
l' Université de Moncton  
Moncton, NB  
October 16, 2008**

Dear Friends, chers Amis et amies:

Je suis très honorée d'être votre invitée, à cette conférence de grande importance pour chacun et chacune de nos citoyens, pour chaque famille au N-B, au Canada et dans le monde entier.

Nous sommes réunis à un moment où – plus qu'auparavant – notre pays, et beaucoup d'autre pays, doivent être vigilants, face à une montante concernant la sécurité de notre nourriture. Quelle occasion et quelle responsabilité pour chacun nous !

There could not be a more commanding opportunity to address the security of our food. This is a time to be seized, to offer the expertise that each of you brings to this conference, to study objectively the challenges which grow day by day on the subject of food safety, food supply, and food costs.

In the invitation which I received from Micha Fardy, Director of Community Development, United Way of Greater Moncton and Southeastern NB, she referred to my speech earlier this year on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Association of Dietitians of NB.

My words: "The food one eats, or fails to eat, is inextricably inked to one's health, to one's recovery in times of sickness, to one's well-being, indeed to one's joy of living."

Yes, I believe this, and I have practiced that philosophy as a nutritionist, as a family doctor, and as an advocate for the healthy early development of Canada's children.

Yet, in 2008, we have greater challenges and greater uncertainty within each and every link in our food supply chain.

The Listeriosis outbreak, the most recent news of dangerously altered baby formula, the debate surrounding biofuels, questions about organic foods, and the rising costs of any Family's weekly food basket- all of this, and so much more, is affecting each one of us as we shop for food, and is a consuming issue throughout the world community. Associations like yours will play an ever greater role in advocating on behalf of your fellow citizens, and guiding them as they make the best food choices for all who sit at each family table in the homes of this nation, from coast to coast.

I am gladdened to be in the presence of this great diversity of stakeholders, and I am reassured that you are sharing your collective experience and wisdom:

- To increase the proportion of New Brunswickers who have access to nutritious, locally-produced foods; and
- To increase the economic viability of local farms



J'aimerais vous dire que ce même sujet était au coeur de notre travail dans le Sénat pendant ces deux dernières années.

My Senate Colleagues have just finished a national study on the subjects you are addressing. They have released in June 2008 the report:

“Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty”

From the executive summary,

- “putting rural Canada Back on the Policy Agenda”
- “the Need for a Rural Champion”
- “Policy Needs to be Broad-based”
- “Policy Needs to Recognize that Rural Canada Doesn’t Necessarily Want to be Urbanized”
- “Rural Policy Needs to Stop Looking for Magic Bullet Solutions”
- “Addressing the Rural Infrastructure Deficit”
- “Bridging the Digital Divide”
- “Revitalizing the Rural Volunteer Sector”

L’une des recommandations vous intéressera particulièrement: la création d’une fondation nationale dédiée aux activités de bénévolat dans le Canada rural. Comme bénévoles extraordinaires, vous pouvez apprécier l’importance de cette vision plus que bien d’autres.

Rural Canada is in continuous competition with our biggest cities for attention and for budgetary commitments. I hope that this Senate report will alter the balance in greater favour of smaller communities and the citizens outside Canada’s metropolitan areas.

Rural Canada desperately needs a stronger voice in Parliament and in our Legislatures. You must demand nothing less.

When I was elected MLA in 1987, I did three things in the first 3 months of my mandate:

- I brought a group of people together to form our first local tourism association. It grows stronger year by year
- I challenged our Town Council to begin a recreation program for those challenged physically and mentally. We succeeded and it flourishes to this day.
- And, I overcame some very negative opinions towards the opening of a food bank in our Town. That was 1988; 20 years later the need grows, and I am thankful to the good people who shared my concern and have faithfully fulfilled the need over two decades.

Vous avez ce même engagement envers vos concitoyens. Je vous remercie du fond du cœur.

Le 6 février dernier, Mme Dianne Swinemar, directrice exécutive, Feed Nova Scotia, a adressé le Sénat au nom de l’Association canadienne des banques alimentaires.

Je cite : “ dans les régions rurales de la Nouvelle-Écosse... nous constatons une énorme vague de déplacement vers l’Ouest... [et] on a constaté une diminution importante du nombre de clients de la



banque alimentaire...[en même temps] une augmentation du nombre de clients de la soupe populaire... parce que plus personne ne s'occupait des personnes âgées... C'est désormais la soupe populaire et non la banque alimentaire qui est la nouvelle réponse des régions rurales canadiennes à la faim et à la pauvreté."

During those Senate hearings on poverty in Canada, I heard much that tore at my heart. Let me mention just a few examples –

Food banks staying open at night so our fellow citizens "... can come in darkness to access food [because]... They do not want to acknowledge to the community that they are in need."

"This year, a food bank had to shut down because the volunteers... were too old to continue...", and she added "... the largest part of that group (those on social assistance) is single mothers who cannot get off the system unless they have childcare for their children."

I urge each of you associated with food banks not just to feed but to teach. Like the famous quotation about fish – "give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime"

Vous savez que mon engagement principal au Sénat était le développement de la petite enfance et la nécessité d'un plus grand système de garderies de qualité. Les liens entre la pauvreté et les besoins des familles pour l'assistance avec les soins pour leurs enfants sont de plus en plus alarmants.

Je dois maintenant adresser d'autres sujets sur votre programme aujourd'hui.

Les prix des produits essentiels pour nos repas deviennent de plus en plus chers. L'un des facteurs responsables pour cette situation est la production des « biofuels ».

July 4, 2008, the World Bank claimed that food prices worldwide had increased 140 percent between 2002 and 2008... [due to] a large-scale push in the US and the EU to convert food crops to biofuels.

A statistics Canada report (June 2008), said that Canadians have largely been cushioned from surging food prices, with just over 10 percent becoming more costly as a result of the conversion of wheat and corn to biofuels. (CBC new, July 4, 2008). Yet, this 10% of foods for which the price has increases is affecting every Canadian family.

Let me quote from the Globe and Mail, September 19, 2008: "Five years ago, Toronto musician Elizabeth Morris began baking bread from scratch because it was fun – and a lot cheaper than "awful" store-bought brands. "Now, with the price of rye flour the way it is... I'm questioning whether we're going to make rye bread any more," ... After summer that has seen soaring costs for ingredients such as flour and chocolate – driven partly by high fuel costs – home-baking enthusiasts are feeling deflated.

"It's getting to the point where you really can't afford to bake," says Hilda Durling, 75, a great-grandmother from Bridgetown, NS... According to the most recent Canadian Consumer Price Index, there has been a 4.3 percent rise in prices for food purchased from stores over the past year, led by a 13.2- percent rise in prices for bakery products.



Price hikes for other food products closely related to grain, such as breakfast cereal, rice, pasta, flour, and flour-based mixed have continued to increase in the 12 months to July, 2008. The hikes are easily noticeable on store shelves. Ms. Norris says she used to pay \$10 for five kilograms of rye flour; now it's \$25 for the same amount. Many bakers have had to resort to creative ways to avoid the pinch."

August reports on inflation are just in; food prices increased 5.2 percent in Canada in one month, the largest leap since June, 2001, largely due to bakery and cereal products rising 14.9 percent over year. (The Globe and Mail, September 23, 2008)

C'est une grande controverse au Canada et dans le monde entier – la bataille contre la famine globale et l'environnement – cet à dire la nécessité d'augmenter la production d'essence nette.

In Canada, the federal government announced March 2008 plans to spend up to \$41.5 billion over 7 years to promote alternate fuels such as ethanol, and said that by 2010, Canadian gasoline will consist of five percent renewable content. (CBC July 4, 2008). This is predicted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, compare4d with fossil fuels, by 3-4 %. (Library of Parliament- Natural Resources Canada).

The food-fuel dilemma is a subject of much debate and concern. The possibility that the biofuel industry could revitalize rural Canada, as well as contribute to a reduction in pollution, must be studied in the context of its eventual impact on food production and food costs.

Je suis certaine que vous allez porté beaucoup d'attention à ce sujet et tous le aspects de ce débat.

I have spoken about poverty, about the impact on food availability and costs of the shift of grains to biofuels, but none of this has caught the attention of Canadians as much as the current Listeriosis outbreak.

The death of 20 Canadians has been described by the CMA as "the worst epidemic of listeriosis in the world". (CMAJ Oct. 7, 2008) The editors go on to say: "Listeria is a ubiquitous soil bacterium. Future food-borne epidemics of listeriosis are certain." They call for a full-scale public inquiry into the major failings of Canada's food inspection system, particularly in view of the transfer of responsibility for inspection from the federal government to food processing companies in 2007.

Et maintenant il y a une inquiétude énorme partout dans la population. Plus récemment, les parents ont commencé à préparer des sandwiches pour les enfants à l'école sans une état de vigilance, plus qu'auparavant.

This vigilance is paramount for our most vulnerable – young children, pregnant women, and frail seniors. I don't think we have scraped the surface yet on this problem. September 13, 2008, this headline "Frozen dinners recalled from charities" (daily Gleaner). About 1, 8500 frozen dinner distributed by Meals on Wheels and similar charitable organizations in BC, Ontario and NB were recalled due to contamination with Listeria. This was not connected to Maple Leaf Foods. In fact, it was creamed salmon with mashed potato and glazed carrots.

But all of this was not the beginning of our anxiety about the food we purchase. During the past year, fear has existed about imported mushrooms, tomatoes, spinach – some organic, others not – the list is long. Plastic bottles for babies came next and now we have the horrible story from China of infant formula



being prepared with toxic levels of added components - Melamine specifically. September 23, 2008, 53,000 babies were reported to be ill in China suffering the excruciating pain of kidney stones, even dying of renal failure. (National Post, September 23, 2008)

That same day, we learned that certain dessert products on our own grocery store shelves were similarly dangerous and were being withdrawn. And last week, certain brands of cookies and candies were also found to have melamine laden milk products among their ingredients.

“The tainted formula scandal is also a reminder that Canada’s own food safety regime should, in addition to screening out dangerous products, allow Canadians to know where their foods are being imported from...Under current rules, products may be labelled “made in Canada” when they have only been processed in Canada.

The new rules, to take effect on Dec. 31, are an improvement: “Product of Canada” will refer to foods in which 98 percent of the ingredients were made in Canada; “Made in Canada” will mean foods for which 51 percent of the manufacturing costs were incurred in Canada. But while products may say “Made in Canada from imported ingredients”, there is no requirement to say where the ingredients come from.

And the two categories will almost certainly create confusion among consumers... China’s scandal is the latest of several that involves tampering with products to make them more profitable. China’s regulatory system does not work, even when backed by the execution of the head of its food safety regulator. Not until China’s economic miracle is seriously at risk is that country likely to change. Until then, labelling of the sources of foreign ingredients would help Canadian consumer be wary.” (Globe and mail, September 19, 2008)

A mon avis, nous sommes arrivés à un moment de grand changement dans nos choix de nourriture. Le temps est maintenant pour notre propre source de légumes, de fruits, de viande et e poisson.

We must revise our shopping to make the healthiest, the safest, the most affordable food choices for ourselves and our families. Where was a food item grown and packaged? What is the nutritional content? What is the food value in relation to the food price? We must demand the highest level of government food regulations and inspection, while we assume our individual responsibility for the food we eat.

It is my sincere hope that we will use this moment to make a wholehearted commitment to our own farmers, fishermen and all whom we trust within our communities. It is time to change our food habits, not just for safety but for our health and well-being, and certainly for cost-consciousness in our food choices.

Each of us can contribute to the revitalizing and the strengthening of rural Canada. We have wonderful Farmer’s markets, and greta bakeries. We have in our grocery stores and our supermarkets many labels which tell us that this product is from Atlantic Canada, and if not, from Canada.

The media continue to confuse us every week on what we need to be healthy, to live long, to stay young. It is our responsibility as experts and advocates to help all our fellow citizens sort out this maze of information in order to have the foods we like in moderation and the foods we need for our bodily health in balance.



For me Canada's Food Guide remains my roadmap to healthy eating, but I know too that chocolate is just fine, that nuts are as good for me as they are for squirrels, that a little wine or beer can keep my blood flowing better, that fibre is for me (and for horses and cows), and that no matter what I eat each day, it's calories that count, and it's obesity that is the enemy for my arthritic joints.

The choice of food comes first. The preparation is next. It is our responsibility to wash thoroughly, to cook thoroughly, and to practice the utmost food cleanliness and food safety, beginning in our own homes.

From now on, I'll buy a lot more Atlantic and Canadian Foods, especially those in season, and I'll cook more family favourites with ingredients I can trust. I'll read labels, particularly for the sodium and fat content, and I'll look first for the country of origin.

Is it time to be nostalgic about our food? I grew up in a family where Sunday dinner was a roast chicken or other roast. We had sandwiches for the rest of the week. The meat was sliced on the pantry counter and the bread was made at home. Today, I wonder how many children know what a baked apple is, or how many parents bake their own breads? Across this land, even in fancy restaurants, bread pudding and rice pudding are favourites again.

Are we looking back fondly at all of this? To some extent, yes. But, mothers have less time in the kitchen and gardens are not to be found in most backyards. The good news is that Canada can feed its own citizens well, so let's promote what we grow and produce right here, and let's help our fellow citizens enjoy quality, affordable, as we begin a new food era in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let's also demand that our F/P/T governments take responsibility as never before for the safety of our food supply.

I applaud your goals to strengthen partnerships and communication, to share best practices and to take all of this back to your communities. You are needed more than ever before, and I know that your work will be more appreciated now and in the future.

Pour notre santé, pour notre plaisir, pour notre sécurité, nous avons beaucoup à faire.

Merci pour votre engagement- votre dédicace. Bonne conférence à tous et à toutes, et merci pour votre attention.

Thank you for your kind attention, and my sincere good wishes as you continue to help and to inspire others to eat well, thankful for the abundance of the harvest we have just celebrated, and hopeful for the future.

Have a great meeting. Blessings to all!

