

for parcel delivery to communities in the Northwest Territories compared to the provinces.

The postage rates for shipments to the territories traditionally had been about three times as high as in the provinces. Important changes have been made also in how funding is applied. The lowest postage rates are provided now for nutritious, perishable food. Food of little nutritional value has been disqualified from funding.

As well, shipments of alcohol and tobacco products are not subsidized under this program. Merchants or individuals must use commercial air cargo service, winter roads, or seasonal marine service for the resupply of these items.

As a result of these changes Canada Post now charges 80 cents per kilogram plus 75 cents per parcel for nutritious, perishable food deliveries to all remote northern communities.

Non-perishable food and non-food items can be mailed to isolated communities in the northern parts of the provinces for \$1 per kilogram plus 75 cents per parcel. In the territories the rate for these items has been maintained at \$2.15 per kilogram plus 75 cents per parcel.

These changes have helped to reduce the prices of perishable food in the Northwest Territories. In some communities there has been a fairly significant reduction in the total cost of the basic northern food basket for a family of four.

In Pond Inlet, for example, the cost of this basket decreased by more than \$30 between 1991 and 1993. Unfortunately there are many communities in which increases in the cost of non-perishable food have offset the reductions in the cost of perishables.

The lack of retail competition in many communities also continues to affect food prices. In Broughton Island where the local co-operative closed, leaving only one store in the community, the cost of the northern food basket actually increased by \$40 between 1992 and 1993 despite the reduction in postal rates for perishables.

From a nutritional perspective, consumption of perishable food in Inuit communities in the Northwest Territories has increased significantly since the postage rates began to decline in October 1991.

In 1991-92 Canada Post shipped 758 tonnes of perishable food to the 10 communities in the Baffin region which traditionally have been on the food mail system. The following year when postage rates were further reduced these shipments increased by more than 35 per cent to 1,040 tonnes.

Despite this increased consumption, there is still a great deal of room for improvement. A government survey of isolated aboriginal communities taken in 1991 and 1993 shows that the

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per capita consumption of store-bought perishable food continues to be much lower in the north than in southern Canada.

As a result, the average intake of vitamin A and calcium is far below recommended levels and the average consumption of sugar in all communities is extremely high. This is obviously undermining the health of northern residents.

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It is also evident that high food costs continue to be the major impediment to improved diets in the north. In the same survey I mentioned a moment ago, between 40 and 50 per cent of women reported that they were extremely concerned about not having enough money for food. In most communities, this was a greater concern than alcohol and drug abuse and family violence. The situation is obviously extremely difficult, but without the food mail program or some alternative, it could be much worse.

It is clear that some form of subsidization must continue for shipments of nutritious, perishable food items to isolated northern communities. The residents of these communities already have many problems to deal with: poverty, overcrowding, family violence, alcohol and substance abuse, cultural disruption, gambling and so on. Hunger and poor health brought on by an inadequate food supply should not be added to the list.

I want to reiterate that the government has already taken the action proposed by the hon. member for Saint-Jean. An interdepartmental committee is now developing the terms of reference for a fundamental review of the food mail program for the next year.

I would urge my hon. colleagues to support this important initiative. The food mail program costs each Canadian taxpayer an average of about one cent per week. This is a very small price to pay, considering the enormous impact the program has on the health and well-being of 86,000 Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): I am pleased to speak to the motion introduced by my colleague from Saint-Jean which calls on the government to take the necessary steps to make food distribution in Canada's North more effective, and therefore more economical, in order to enable the Inuit to purchase higher quality food at a lower price.

I listened closely to the speeches given by the hon. member for Saint-Jean and by my Reform and government colleagues. They have certainly defined the problem of food distribution in the North quite well.

I want to use my time to focus in particular on the situation in the Nunavik territories, that is in northern Quebec and certain parts of Nunavut which correspond to what used to be called Keewatin, Baffin Island and Kitikmeot. Everyone no doubt agrees that the major problem with food distribution in the