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**Results of the Survey on Food Quality
in Six Isolated Communities in Labrador, March 2001**

Results of the Survey on Food Quality in Six Isolated Communities in Labrador, March 2001

“The goal of the Food Mail Program is to provide good quality, affordable nutritious food to isolated northern communities. This program is an important element in our continuing efforts to improve the health of northern communities.”

**Honourable Robert Nault,
Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development**

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dans six collectivités isolées du Labrador, mars 2001*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To make nutritious, perishable food more affordable in isolated communities, the federal government set up the Northern Air Stage Program. The program, also known as the Food Mail Program, is administered by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). INAC provides funding to Canada Post to transport nutritious, perishable foods by air to isolated communities. This funding helps keep the cost of food down.

In February 2000, a meeting was held with Labrador retailers who were concerned about the quality of food being delivered to their communities. Food handling by wholesalers, transport companies and retailers was identified as the main problem. Following that meeting, a pilot project was devised and implemented for all communities served out of Happy Valley-Goose Bay. This is the entry point for foods shipped under the Food Mail Program in Labrador.

The findings of a report, prepared by the Air Cargo Transportation Research Group of Laval University, were used to develop training on how to properly handle perishable foods during warehousing and transportation. Since March 2001, wholesalers, trucking and airline cargo staff and retailers have all been given extensive training. The training focussed on the best conditions for storing and transporting perishable products. The training included information on proper packaging, temperature requirements, handling and separating products to prolong the shelf life of foods.

Before the pilot project began, a survey was mailed to all residents and retailers in six Labrador communities in March 2001. The survey gathered information on how satisfied both customers and retailers were with the quality and variety of perishable foods shipped to their communities. These communities included Black Tickle, Hopedale, Makkovik, Nain, Postville and Rigolet.

The key findings of the survey will help assess the impact of the guidelines developed for packaging, storage facilities, handling and sanitation and the training provided to all the above mentioned stakeholders to improve the quality of perishable foods. INAC will conduct a second survey in March of 2002 to see if food quality has improved since the first survey. This information will be used to benefit other Northern communities. Improvements will be implemented elsewhere if they are successful in Labrador.

Customers and retailers were also asked about the variety of foods offered to Northerners. Although not directly tied to the main objective of the pilot project, it is believed that the overarching goal of improving Northerners' health can only be achieved through access to a variety of high-quality perishable foods.

When asked about the quality of various foods available, only eggs and fresh milk were rated as of good or excellent quality by a majority of Labrador customers. Most customers also described all other products, fruits, vegetables and bread as being either of poor or fair quality. On the other hand, most retailers answered that all products were either of good or excellent quality.

Customers were asked if they noticed any change in the quality of food or in prices since the previous year. Most of them replied that they believed prices had gone up. They also believed that the quality of the food had remained the same.

The customers were asked if they thought the quality of food changed with the seasons. Most customers answered that summer was the best season. Forty-one percent thought that winter was the worst season. Half the retailers said that fall was the best season. A third of them thought that summer was the worst season.

Retailers identified flight delays as the main cause of food quality problems. Other causes were also mentioned, but transportation of the food from the airport to the stores was not one of them.

Customers and retailers were asked about the availability of a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables. Eighty percent or more of Labrador customers said there was either never or sometimes enough variety available. In contrast, 80% of retailers said most of the time they had enough variety of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Customers gave five main reasons to explain why they did not buy more fresh fruit and vegetables. A majority of customers said that these foods cost too much, they often are not available, their quality is poor and there is not enough variety. Forty-one percent of customers also said that they cannot afford to buy them.

Retailers were asked how often they receive complaints from customers about the quality of food. A third of the retailers said they never received complaints. The other two thirds said they received complaints once in a while. Compared to the customers' opinions, the retailers' answers to this question are puzzling.

The findings have shown that there is a lack of quality and a lack of variety of fresh and frozen perishable foods in Labrador. Customers have clearly and repeatedly said that they are not satisfied with the products sold in their communities. They are also dissatisfied because they believe these products are expensive. On the other hand, the retailers seem to say that there are no serious problems with the products sold in their stores. According to them, these products are of good quality and a large variety of fresh and frozen perishable foods are made available to their customers at all times. A key finding of this report is the gap between the views of customers and retailers about food quality.

BACKGROUND

To make nutritious, perishable food more affordable in isolated communities, the federal government established the Northern Air Stage Program. The program, also known as the Food Mail Program, is administered by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). INAC provides funding to Canada Post for transporting nutritious, perishable foods to isolated communities by air. This funding helps keep the cost of food down.

In February 2000, a meeting was held with Labrador retailers who had expressed concerns about the quality of food being delivered to their communities. Food handling by wholesalers, transport companies and retailers was identified as being the main problem. Following that meeting, a pilot project was devised and implemented for all communities served out of Happy Valley-Goose Bay – the entry point for foods shipped under the Food Mail Program in Labrador.

A report was prepared by the Air Cargo Transportation Research Group of Laval

University entitled *Quality of perishable products (fruits and vegetables) during distribution in Labrador*. The report identified the environmental conditions responsible for the lower quality of fresh perishable foods shipped to Labrador communities from their departure in Montréal through to their final destination. The goal was to improve these conditions to ultimately improve the quality and freshness of the products.

The above findings were then used to train all involved in the proper handling of perishable foods during warehousing and transportation. Wholesalers, trucking and airline cargo staff and retailers were all provided extensive training on the best conditions for storing and transporting perishable products including proper packaging, temperature requirements, handling and separating products to prolong the shelf life of foods shipped under this program.

In the meantime, a survey was circulated to all residents and retailers in six Labrador communities in March 2001 to gather baseline information on the satisfaction levels of both customers and retailers about the quality and variety of perishable foods shipped to their communities. These communities included Black Tickle, Hopedale, Makkovik, Nain, Postville and Rigolet. Davis Inlet was also included in the retailer survey.

This report summarizes the survey's key findings and will be used to assess the impact of the guidelines developed for packaging, storage facilities, handling and sanitation and the training provided to all the above-mentioned stakeholders to improve the quality of perishable foods. INAC will conduct a second survey in March of 2002 to see if food quality has improved since the first survey. This information will then be used for the benefit of other Northern communities, because improvements will be implemented elsewhere if they are shown to have been successful in Labrador.

Another dimension was added to the survey relating to the variety of foods offered to Northerners. Although not directly tied to the primary objective of the pilot project, it is believed that the overarching goal of improving Northerners' health can only be achieved if they can buy a variety of high-quality perishable foods.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The tables and graphs in this document present the information collected and tabulated from a survey circulated at the beginning of March 2001 to all households and retailers of fresh and frozen food in six Labrador communities: Black Tickle, Hopedale, Makkovik, Nain, Postville and Rigolet. All of these communities, which are users of the Food Mail Program, are being supplied with fresh and frozen food from wholesalers located in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

In each community, all households and retailers received a survey circulated by mail. Self-identified food shoppers of households were invited to fill out the questionnaire and return it in a postage-paid envelope. Households had the option to use either the Inuktitut or

English language questionnaire, both of which were included in the mail out. Respondents were told that the survey results would be provided to community residents later in the year. The response rate for all communities was 29%, which is considered an excellent response rate for a mailed-out survey. The response rate in communities ranged from 25% in Black Tickle and Postville to 44% in Rigolet (see **Table 1** for more details).

Table 1. Labrador Household Survey - Response Rate

	No. sent	No. returned					Response rate (%)
		Inuit	Innu	Metis	Other	Total	
Black Tickle	100			17	8	25	25
Hopedale	172	38			9	47	27
Makkovik	123	32		2	10	44	36
Nain	383	91		1	9	101	26
Postville	76	13	1		5	19	25
Rigolet	75	24	1	1	7	33	44
Total	929	198	2	21	48	269	29

As **Table 1** reveals, question number 9 of the survey asked customers to provide their Aboriginal background to allow the option for group-specific analysis if there were indications that different groups had different perceptions. However, preliminary analysis did not indicate any marked differences in the results. Therefore, this report does not provide separate results for each group.

All 14 retailers in the named Labrador communities and Davis Inlet received a questionnaire slightly different from the one sent to households. Six retailers returned a completed survey for a response rate of 43%. Because of the size of the sample, caution must be exercised when interpreting the data obtained from retailers. However, there was at least one response from a retailer in most of the communities surveyed.

Differences between questionnaires sent to customers and retailers

The questionnaires sent to customers and retailers were very similar. Most questions were developed so that the answers of the two target audiences could be compared. For example, in question 3, customers were asked which foods they had bought in the past 4 weeks while retailers were asked which foods they had received as Food Mail during the same period. Questions 1 to 6 are the same type, so that the responses of customers and retailers could be compared. However, questions 7 to 10 are completely different and retailers had an extra question on their questionnaire (see appendices for more details).

Use of percentages for tables and graphs

In an effort to make the data more understandable, the raw data were converted to percentages for both customers and retailers. Percentages shown in the graphs do not always add up to 100 because in most cases, the not-applicable or “left blank” responses were left out.

Use of indexes

In a further effort to render the data collected more intelligible, summary indexes were used for questions 1 and 2. These indexes are not to be used for absolute differences between each community, although the scores allow a ranking from worst to best. However, please keep in mind that this ranking does not allow one to say how much better or worse the food is in one community compared to another.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RESULTS

"Please act on my survey!"

Quality of various foods

The opening question of the survey was: "How would you describe the quality of the following kinds of food sold in your community IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS (December 2000, January and February 2001)?" Customers were asked to rate the quality of a list of fresh perishable foods from poor, to fair, to good or excellent. Answers "left blank" were also tracked.

The responses to this question were quite variable. They ranged from good and excellent for eggs, to poor and fair for fresh meat in all communities. However, from one community to the other, very similar trends were observed in terms of perceived food quality. For instance, bananas and grapes were identified as being poor or fair by more than 75% of the Labrador customers surveyed. Also, more than 77% of Labrador customers said that frozen meat was of poor or fair quality with 41% of them listing it as of poor quality. The following foods were identified as being of poor or fair quality and are presented in ascending order from poorest to fair quality: frozen meat (77%), bananas and grapes (75%), lettuce, tomatoes and peppers (73%), berries (68%), fresh meat (67%, with 46% rating it as of poor quality), apples and oranges (67%), broccoli and cauliflower (64%), potatoes (59%), carrots, onions, turnips and cabbage (56%), frozen vegetables (55%) and bread (51%).

Only two products were rated as being of good or excellent quality by a majority of Labrador customers, namely, eggs (74%) and fresh milk (59%).

Berries and fresh meat had a high percentage of n/a's, accompanied by customers' comments that they could not rate these products because they simply were not available.

Table 2. Quality rating by Labrador customers

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	N/A	Total
a.Apples, oranges	14%	53%	30%	3%	0%	100%
b.Bananas, grapes	23%	52%	22%	3%	0%	100%
c.Berries	37%	31%	19%	2%	11%	100%
d.Potatoes	15%	44%	35%	5%	0%	100%
e.Carrots, onions, turnips,cabbage	8%	48%	40%	5%	0%	100%
f. Lettuce, tomatoes, peppers	23%	50%	23%	3%	0%	100%
g.Broccoli, cauliflower	18%	46%	32%	3%	1%	100%
h.Bread	15%	36%	40%	7%	1%	100%
i.Eggs	2%	24%	57%	17%	0%	100%
j.Fresh milk	11%	28%	47%	12%	3%	100%
k.Fresh meat	46%	21%	14%	5%	15%	100%
l.Frozen meat	41%	36%	17%	5%	0%	100%
m.Frozen vegetables	15%	40%	38%	6%	2%	100%
n.Other	17%	49%	30%	4%	1%	100%

Figure 1. Perception of Food Quality of Customers in Labrador

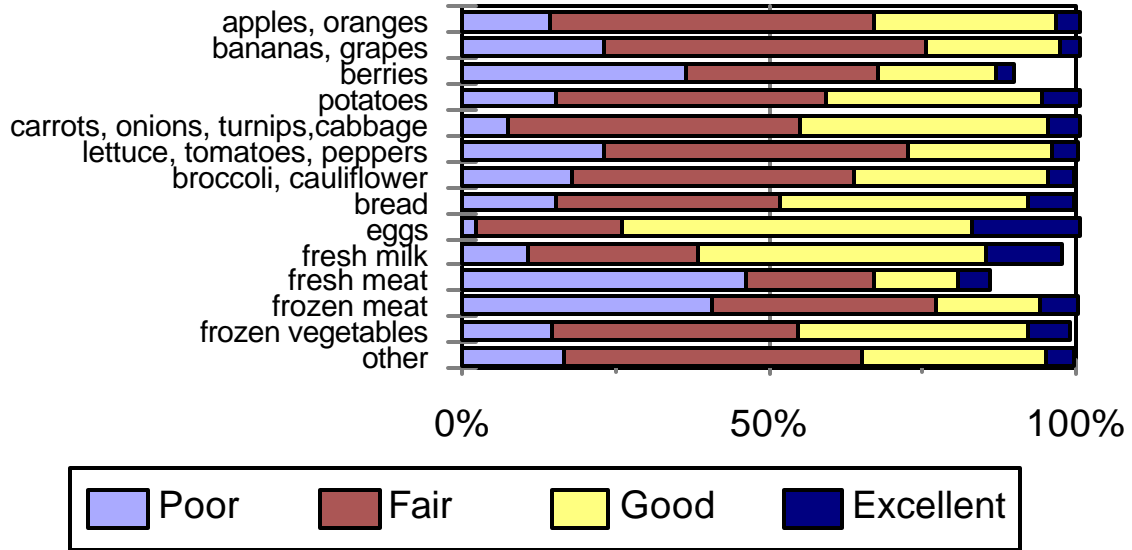
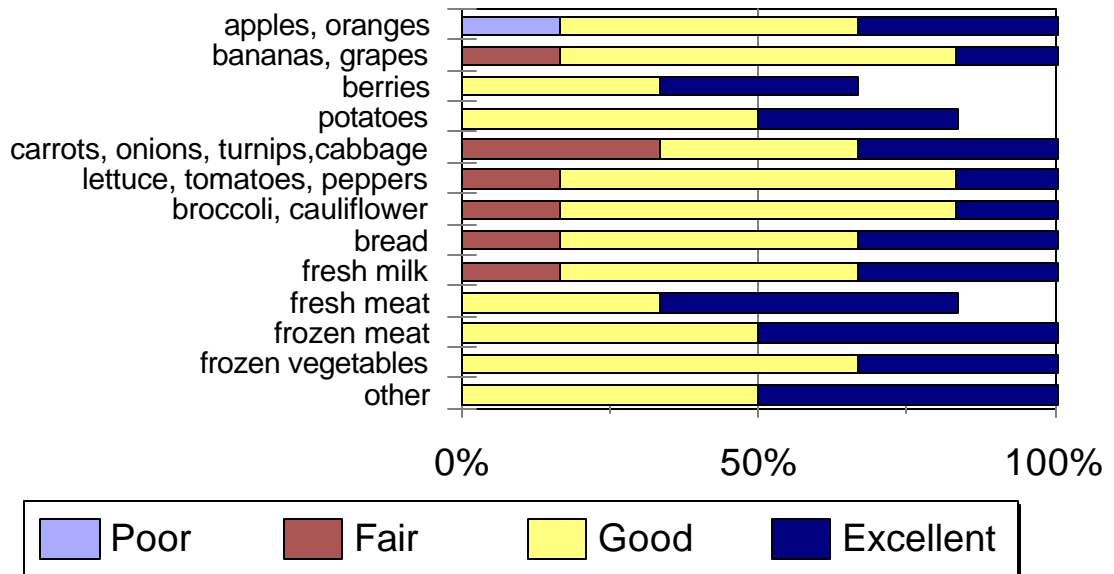


Figure 2. Perception of Food Quality of Retailers in Labrador



The question that retailers were asked was very similar to the one customers were asked: “How would you describe the quality of the following food available in your store IN THE PAST THREE MONTHS (December 2000, January and February 2001)?”.

To that question, most retailers answered that all products had either good or excellent quality, and only the following few foods were rated fair: bananas and grapes; carrots, onions, turnips and cabbage; lettuce, tomatoes and peppers; broccoli and cauliflower; bread; and fresh milk. Only one retailer rated the quality of apples and oranges as poor.

Please note that eggs were not included in the retailers’ questionnaire.

In an effort to capture the overall satisfaction of customers in each community and of retailers, an index was developed by simply multiplying by a factor of one for “poor” ratings, of two for “fair” ratings, of three for “good” ratings and of four for “excellent” ratings. These scores were then divided by the number of respondents who rated each product to obtain a score for each community and for all customers and retailers. Average scores ranged from 2.04 for customers in Postville to 3.23 for retailers, indicating the least satisfaction with the quality of food from the former and most satisfaction with the latter. See **Table 3** for more details.

Table 3. Index of Perceived Food Quality

Postville	2.04
Rigolet	2.16
Hopedale	2.18
Nain	2.24
All Customers	2.25
Makkovik	2.31
Black Tickle	2.55
Retailers	3.23

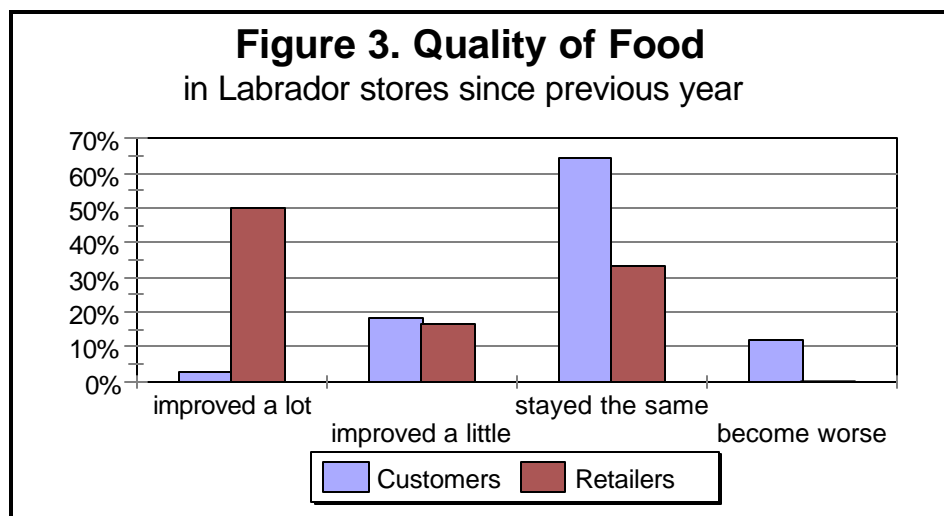
Retailers’ problems with the quality of certain foods

In a follow-up question, retailers were asked to list the foods they have the greatest problem with in terms of quality. Individual retailers listed bananas, Red Delicious apples, fresh milk, grapes, carrots, cabbage and broccoli. These answers are consistent with quality problems raised by customers except for fresh milk, one of the few products identified as being of good or excellent quality by a majority of the respondents.

Change in quality of food since the previous year

Also in a follow-up question about quality, both customers and retailers were asked if they had noticed a change in the quality of food since the same period of time the year before. Possible answers included: improved a lot, improved a little, stayed the same or become worse. Twenty percent of customers indicated an improvement, but the vast majority (65%) claimed there had not been any change. A little over 1 in 10 (12%) stated that the quality of food had become worse.

As for retailers, 67% claimed that the quality of food had improved since the same time last year and the balance, 33%, stated that the quality had remained the same. See **Figure 3** for complete figures.



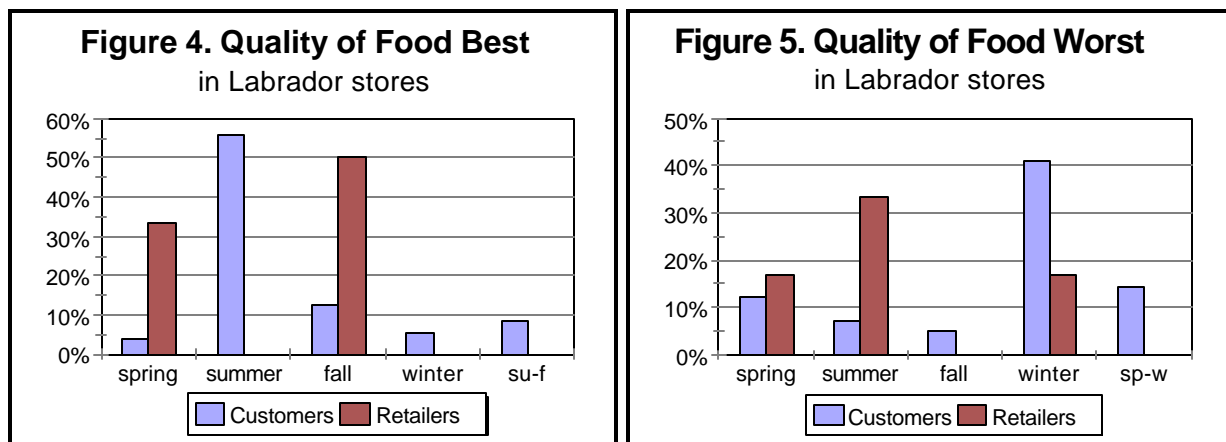
Price variation since the previous year

In question number 8, customers were asked: “Since this time last year, how has the price of fruit and vegetables in your community changed?” A majority of customers (63%) indicated that prices had gone up since the same time last year. While question 4 revealed that about the same percentage of customers (65%) believed the *quality* of fresh foods had remained the same, about the same percentage also believed that the *prices* for these products had gone up. Although it is well-known that transportation costs have increased significantly, mainly because of rising energy costs, the Food Mail Program postage rates have been maintained at the same level since 1993, with only a few changes made to qualifying products in 1996. Therefore, if in fact prices have gone up as perceived by customers, other factors (e.g., truck transportation, greenhouse and warehouse heating costs) may be responsible for driving up the price.

Is there a season when the quality of food is better, worse?

In an attempt to identify whether seasonal factors affect the quality of food available in Labrador communities, both customers and retailers were asked in what season they found the quality to be best or worst. Spring, summer, fall and winter were listed as possible answers for both the best and worst time. Respondents did use all possible combinations by selecting more than one season. However, we only used the five most common answers which were: for best season(s), spring, summer, fall, winter and summer-fall; and for worst season(s), spring, summer, fall, winter and spring-winter.

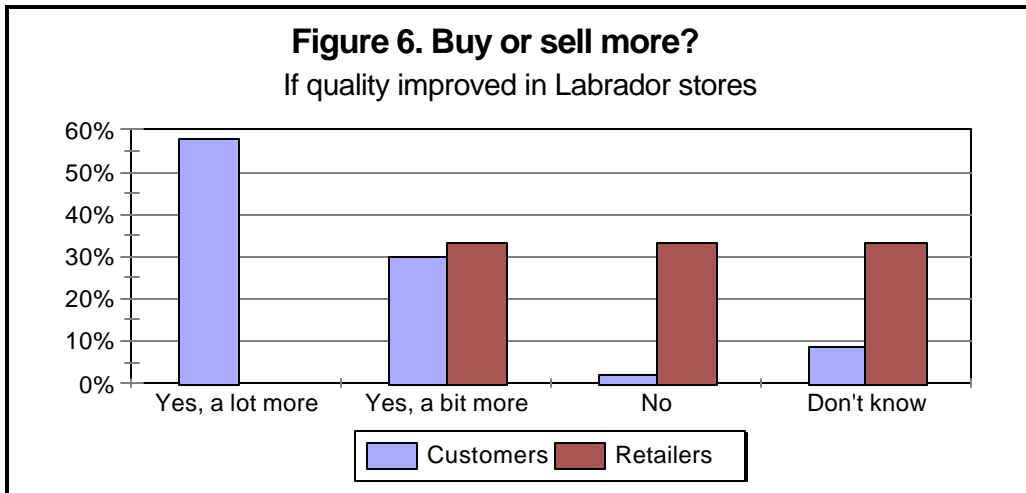
For the best season, 56% of customers selected summer, while 50% of retailers chose fall and another 33% chose spring. As for the worst season for quality of food, 41% of customers selected winter while 33% of retailers selected summer. None of the retailers picked summer as the season for the best quality of food. The trend here is one that we have observed in other questions concerning the quality of food, and highlights the opposing views of customers and retailers. The reasons for these differences in customers' and retailers' views are unknown. For more details, see **Figures 4 and 5**.



What people say they would do if the quality of food improved

When asked what they would do if the quality of fresh fruits and vegetables improved in their community, 58% of customers said they would buy a lot more of them, and another 30% stated they would buy a bit more.

When asked if they thought they would sell more fresh fruits and vegetables if the quality improved, a third of the retailers agreed they would sell a bit more, with another third stating they did not think they would sell more, while the remaining third admitted they did not know what the effect would be. See **Figure 6** for complete numbers.



Impact on prices if quality of food improved

Because efforts are being made to increase the quality of fresh perishable foods by improving handling during all stages of transportation from wholesaler to retailers, retailers were asked how better quality products would affect prices. Possible answers ranged from increasing prices because customers would be willing to pay more, lowering prices because retailers would have less spoilage, or continuing to charge the same price. Half of the retailers said they would keep the same price on these fresh foods, while another third said they would lower prices. No one said they would increase the prices, but one retailer declined to answer that question.

Main cause of quality problems according to retailers

In question 9, retailers were presented with a list of 8 possible causes for quality problems with fresh perishable foods. Half of the retailers said flight delays were the main cause of quality problems and a further third also identified all of the following: poor handling by the airline, poor quality available from suppliers in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, poor temperature control on the plane and inadequate storage facilities at the airport. Another third of the retailers said they did not have any problem with the quality of foods and one (17%) said that the packaging was not adequate. None chose damage in getting the food from the airport to their store as a possible cause of quality problems.

Food spoilage

Question 10 asked retailers: “How much of the following foods have you thrown out because of poor quality or spoilage in a typical week DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS (December 2000, January and February 2001).” For most of the products listed, retailers indicated that less than 5% had to be disposed of due to spoilage. A few indicated that they sometimes had between 5 and 10% spoilage. Only 1 retailer (not necessarily the same) identified having spoilage of 10 to 20% for apples, bananas and grapes and fresh milk. One retailer indicated having spoilage of 20 to 40% for carrots and cabbage.

There is no set industry norm for food spoilage in the food retail sector. However, it is generally agreed that spoilage is between 3 and 17% – spoilage is higher for highly perishable foods. Considering the transportation challenges and the particular weather conditions in Labrador and northern communities in general, spoilage of under 5% for most fresh foods as indicated by a majority of Labrador retailers is worth noting. With 95% of fresh foods sold to customers, according to the surveyed retailers, the customers’ poor satisfaction rating is not surprising.

Variety of fresh fruit and vegetables available

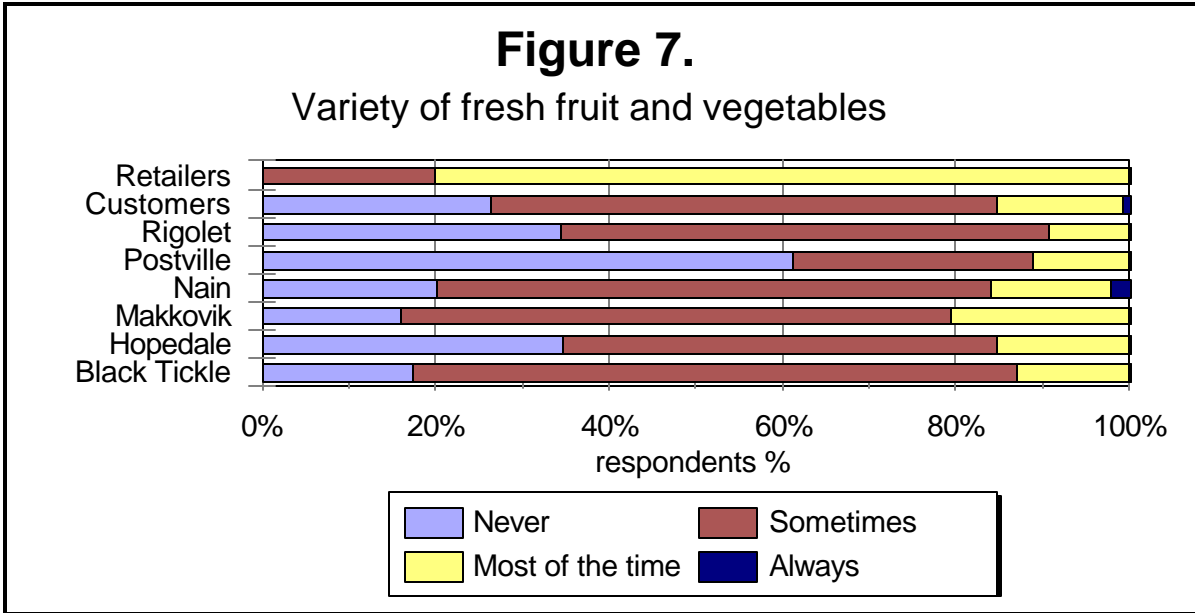
For the second survey question, customers were asked: “Is there enough variety of fresh fruit and vegetables available?” Respondents were given the option to tick one of the following answers: never, sometimes, most of the time or always.

In all the Labrador communities where the survey was conducted, 80% of customers or more said there was never or sometimes enough variety of fresh fruit and vegetables available. In Postville, 61% of its respondents indicated there was never enough variety.

In contrast, only 20% of the retailers said that they sometimes had enough variety of fresh fruit and vegetables. Eighty percent indicated that most of the time, variety was available.

For more details, please see **Tables 4 and 5** and **Figure 7**.

Communities	Never	Sometime	Most of the time	Always	Total
Black Tickle	17%	70%	13%	0%	100%
Hopedale	35%	50%	15%	0%	100%
Makkovik	16%	64%	20%	0%	100%
Nain	20%	64%	14%	2%	100%
Postville	61%	28%	11%	0%	100%
Rigolet	34%	56%	9%	0%	100%
Customers	26%	58%	14%	1%	100%
Retailers	0%	20%	80%	0%	100%



Again, in an effort to capture the overall satisfaction of customers in each community and of retailers regarding the variety of fresh foods, an index was developed by simply multiplying by a factor of one for “never” ratings, of two for “sometimes” ratings, of three for “most of the time” ratings and of four for “always” ratings. These scores were then divided by the number of respondents to obtain a score, for each community and for all customers and retailers. Averages ranged from 1.50 for Postville to 2.80 for retailers, indicating the least satisfaction with the variety of fresh foods from the former and most satisfaction with the latter. See **Table 5** for more details.

Table 5. Index of Perceived Variety of Fresh Foods

Postville	1.50
Rigolet	1.75
Hopedale	1.80
All Customers	1.89
Black Tickle	1.96
Nain	1.98
Makkovik	2.05
Retailers	2.80

Finally, a consolidated index was developed using both indexes (**Table 3 and 5**), on quality and variety, to determine differences in satisfaction level from customers in the six communities surveyed. By combining both indexes and dividing them by two, a consolidated index was obtained. This index reveals that Postville, Rigolet and Hopedale consistently rank first, second and third in customer dissatisfaction with the quality and variety of fresh foods offered in their communities. Nain ranked fourth, Makkovik fifth and Black Tickle sixth in terms of customer dissatisfaction with quality and variety of fresh foods available.

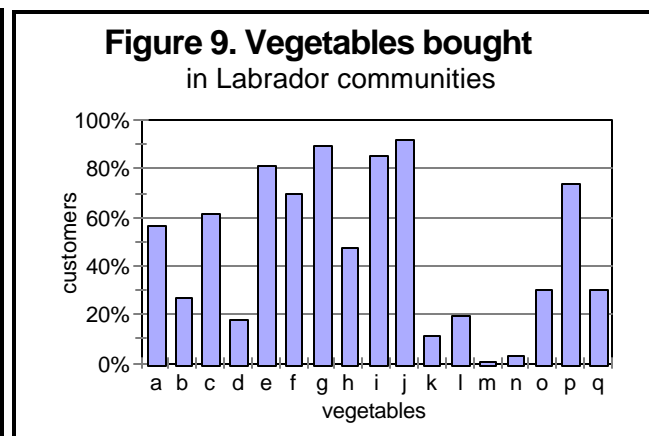
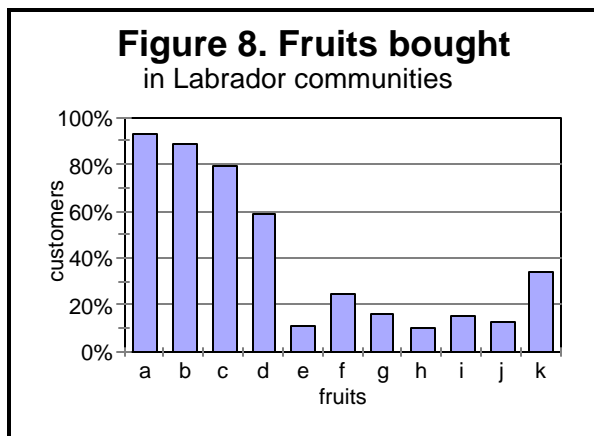
As for the retailers, they consistently scored highest in these indexes, indicating the highest level of satisfaction with the quality and variety of fresh foods offered. Please see **Table 6** for more details.

Table 6. Consolidated Index of Quality and Variety of Fresh Foods

Postville	1.77
Rigolet	1.96
Hopedale	1.99
All Customers	2.07
Nain	2.11
Makkovik	2.18
Black Tickle	2.25
Retailers	3.01

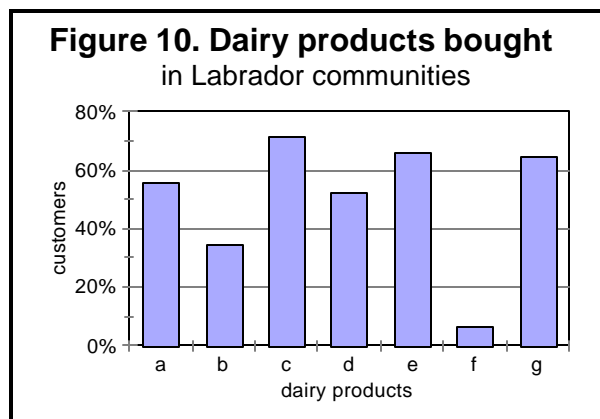
Fresh foods bought by customers or received by retailers in the previous month

Question 3 on the foods bought allows us to profile the average Labrador customer. We know that the most commonly bought fruits are apples (93%), oranges (88%), bananas (79%) and grapes (59%); and that to a lesser degree, frozen juice (34%), kiwi (25%), plums (16%), grapefruits (15%), berries (11%) and melons (10%) are all part of Labradorians' winter diet. Furthermore, the most commonly purchased vegetables include potatoes (92%), onions (89%), carrots (86%), turnips (81%), frozen French fries (74%), cabbage (70%), tomatoes (62%), lettuce (57%), peppers (48%) and to a lesser degree, mushrooms (30%), broccoli (27%), celery (19%), cauliflower (18%), cucumber (12%), spinach (3%) and squash (1%). See **Figures 8 and 9**.



Legend for fruits
a=apples, b=oranges, c=bananas, d=grapes, e=berries, f=kiwi, g=plums, h=melons, i=grapefruit, j=other, k=frozen juice

Legend for vegetables
a=lettuce, b=broccoli, c=tomatoes, d=cauliflower, e=turnips, f=cabbage, g=onions, h=peppers, i=carrots, j=potatoes, k=cucumber, l=celery, m=squash, n=spinach, o=mushrooms,



Legend for dairy products
a=fresh milk, b=boxed milk, c=cheese, d=yogurt, e=ice cream, f=powdered milk, g=evaporated milk

Dairy products and frozen meat, pizza and fish were also on the list of products in the questionnaire. Most of these products were purchased by a majority of customers, except for boxed milk (34%), powdered milk (6%) and fish (32%). See **Figures 10 and 11** for more details.

When looking at the types of foods bought in the previous month, we are able to establish that a majority of customers bought between 3 and 5 fruits (60%), 5 and more vegetables

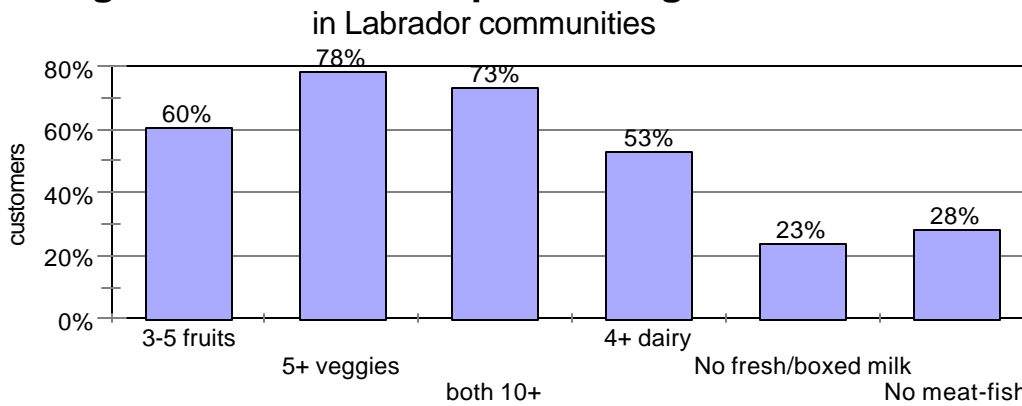
Figure 11. Other frozen food bought
in Labrador communities



(78%), or that more than 73% of customers bought a combined 10 or more fruits or vegetables indicating a strong preference for variety. More than half of the customers (53%) bought 4 or more dairy products, although almost 1 in 4 households did not buy any milk, whether fresh or boxed. However, 65% of Labrador households bought evaporated milk, reflecting a tradition of buying milk in a form that can be easily stored and that offers consistent quality. Finally, almost 1 in 3 customers did not buy any frozen meat or fish (28%),

reflecting the high reliance on country food for protein, and perhaps reflecting the poor quality of store meats available. See **Figure 12** for more details.

Figure 12. Customers' purchasing habits
in Labrador communities



Retailers were asked what food they had received by Food Mail in the 4 weeks before they completed the survey. Of the fruits listed in the survey, 1 in 2 retailers stated having received berries and frozen juice, and 5 of 6 had received plums, melons and grapefruit. All said they had received apples, oranges, bananas, grapes and kiwi. Of the vegetables listed, 1 in 6 retailers stated having received squash, only half had received spinach, but more than 60% had cucumber and frozen French fries air-lifted, and 5 of 6 had received cabbage or potatoes. All retailers declared having received lettuce, broccoli, tomatoes, cauliflower, turnips, onions, celery and mushrooms during the past four weeks through the Food Mail Program.

None of the responding retailers had received powdered or evaporated milk, most likely indicating that these products are not being air-lifted through the Food Mail Program, but rather transported by marine service before freeze-up. Also, among dairy products, only a

third of the retailers indicated having received boxed milk during the same period, again, possibly because that product had arrived by marine service the previous fall.

What is keeping people from buying more fresh fruit and vegetables?

In question 7, customers were asked what was keeping them from buying more fresh fruit and vegetables. Customers were asked to choose from 14 different reasons with the option of adding one if necessary. Of all available options, 5 main reasons appear to explain why people are not buying more fresh fruit and vegetables: these foods cost too much (80%), they often are not available (77%), their quality is poor (69%), there is not enough variety (56%) and customers say they cannot afford them (41%).

"I feel that my children aren't used to eating or even following Canada's Food Guide because a fresh fruit in our home is a luxury, a privilege."

Foods not reaching Labrador communities

When asked if there were any fresh or frozen foods retailers would like to sell that are not usually available from their supplier, a majority of them (67%) said there were none. However, 2 retailers (33%) said yes and listed baby food, variety of squash, melons, salads, different fruit varieties, and other fresh fruit, e.g., strawberries.

In an open-ended question at the end of the survey, customers were asked if they had any comments and suggestions to make and, more specifically, if there were any fresh or frozen foods they would like to see at their store that are not usually available. The most frequent comments related to the need for more variety and to the freshness of fruits and vegetables, meat (e.g., baby back ribs and lean ground beef), both fresh and frozen, including deli meats and country food, fish (e.g., cod, capelin, salmon, char, arctic char, smoked char and seal) and seafood (e.g., scallops, crab, shrimp and lobster).

Complaints from customers

Question 8 to retailers asked how often they received complaints from customers about food quality. A third (2) of retailers said they never received complaints, while the other two thirds

(4) said they received complaints once in a while. Considering the findings from the customer surveys previously described, retailers' answers to this question are puzzling, to say the least. Further comments expressed by customers in the following section suggest that retailers should be receiving complaints from the former more often than once in a while.

"If there's something rotting or moldy, they should not even put it on the shelves to buy."

General comments and suggestions

In the last question of their survey, customers were asked to add general comments and suggestions. Two thirds of the customers felt the need to add comments to the survey. These comments reinforce the idea that foods in Labrador are very expensive in view of their quality, i.e., freshness, and, that there is a need for more variety of available fresh perishable foods. Strongly worded comments were made by customers about the quality of the frozen meats, that they often described as freezer-burned. Similar comments were made about the fact that spoiled and out-of-date foods were left on shelves to be sold.

CONCLUSION

In light of the preceding findings, there should be no doubt about the lack of quality and variety of fresh and frozen perishable foods in Labrador. Customers have clearly and repeatedly expressed that they are not satisfied with the products sold in their communities. Their dissatisfaction is compounded by the fact that these products are also perceived to be expensive.

On the other hand, the message expressed by retailers surveyed seems to be that there are no serious problems with the products being sold in their stores, even though retailers were the ones who originally raised the issue of food quality. According to them, these products are of good quality and a large variety of fresh and frozen perishable foods are available to their customers. Customer satisfaction begins with a willingness on the part of retailers to look at the current state of affairs with a desire to improve quality for the benefit of both customers and retailers, and with the likelihood that these improvements will help reduce the quantities of spoiled foods.

A third of retailers said they did not have any problem with the quality of foods.

The gap between the perception of food quality between customers and retailers is definitely a key finding of this report. Concrete steps need to be taken to bridge that gap by ensuring that communication channels between those two groups are kept open and by demonstrating that concerted efforts can lead to improvement. Identifying the factors that lead to differences in food quality among neighbouring communities might also contribute to improving the quality of foods for all communities in the region.

The gap between the perception of food quality between customers and retailers is definitely a key finding of this report.

INAC will be conducting a second food quality survey in those same Labrador communities in March 2002 to see if food quality has improved since the first survey. Also, Canada Post will have qualified personnel doing food inspections in Happy Valley-Goose Bay starting in 2002 to ensure the food being shipped to Labrador communities meets basic quality requirements as set out in the guidelines. Additional training on proper packaging, storage facilities, handling and sanitation will be provided to Labrador retailers as requested. Guidelines and training will also be implemented elsewhere for the benefit of other Northern communities.

APPENDICES

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY ON FOOD QUALITY IN LABRADOR

Community: _____

1. How would you describe the quality of the following kinds of food sold in your community IN THE PAST 3 MONTHS (December, January, February)?

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Apples, oranges	G	G	G	G
Bananas, grapes	G	G	G	G
Berries	G	G	G	G
Potatoes	G	G	G	G
Carrots, onions, turnips, cabbage	G	G	G	G
Lettuce, tomatoes, peppers	G	G	G	G
Broccoli, cauliflower	G	G	G	G
Bread	G	G	G	G
Eggs	G	G	G	G
Fresh milk	G	G	G	G
Fresh meat	G	G	G	G
Frozen meat	G	G	G	G
Frozen vegetables	G	G	G	G
Other frozen food	G	G	G	G

2. Is there enough variety of fresh fruit and vegetables available?

G Never G Sometimes G Most of the time G Always

3. Which of the following foods have you bought IN THE PAST 4 WEEKS?

- Fresh fruit: GApples GOranges GBananas GGrapes GBerries
 GKiwifruit GPlums GMelons GGrapefruit GOther
- Fresh vegetables: GLettuce GBroccoli GTomatoes GCauliflower GTurnips
 GCabbage GOnions GPeppers GCarrots GPotatoes
 GCucumber GCelery GSquash GSpinach GMushrooms
- Milk products: GFresh milk GBoxed milk GCheese GYogurt GIce cream
 GPowdered milk GEvaporated milk
- Frozen food: GFrozen meat GFrozen pizza GFrozen fish
 GFrench fries GOther frozen vegetables GFrozen juice

4. Since this time last year, has the quality of food in your community

- G improved a lot?
- G improved a little?
- G stayed the same?
- G become worse?

5. When do you find the quality of food to be best and worst?

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Best in</u> | <u>Worst in</u> |
| G Spring | G Spring |
| G Summer | G Summer |
| G Fall | G Fall |
| G Winter | G Winter |

6. If the quality of fresh fruit and vegetables improved in your community, would you buy more of these foods?

- G Yes, a lot more G Yes, a bit more G No G Don't know

7. What is keeping you from buying more fresh fruit and vegetables? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| G They cost too much | G Don't like the taste |
| G Poor quality | G Too much trouble to cook them |
| G Not enough variety | G Don't need these foods to be healthy |
| G Often not available | G Already eat a lot of these foods |
| G Don't know how to use them | G Can't digest these foods |
| G They don't keep well at home | G Can't afford them |
| G Prefer canned products | G Prefer frozen products |
| G Another reason: _____ | |

8. Since this time last year, how has the price of fresh fruit and vegetables in your community changed?

- G Gone up
- G Gone down
- G Stayed the same
- G Don't know

9. Different groups of people may not have the same opinion about the foods available in your community. Therefore, it would be helpful if you would tell us which group you belong to:

- G Inuit
- G Innu
- G Metis
- G Other

10. Where do you usually buy fresh fruit and vegetables?

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS:

Are there any fresh or frozen foods you would like to see at the store that are not usually available?

- G No
- G Yes, Please name them:

Do you have any comments or suggestions about the quality, variety or price of fresh and frozen food sold in your community?

RETAILER SURVEY ON FOOD QUALITY IN LABRADOR

1. How would you describe the quality of the following kinds of food available in your store IN THE PAST THREE MONTHS (December, January, February)?

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Apples, oranges	G	G	G	G
Bananas, grapes	G	G	G	G
Berries	G	G	G	G
Potatoes	G	G	G	G
Carrots, onions, turnips, cabbage	G	G	G	G
Lettuce, tomatoes, peppers	G	G	G	G
Broccoli, cauliflower	G	G	G	G
Bread	G	G	G	G
Fresh milk	G	G	G	G
Fresh meat	G	G	G	G
Frozen meat	G	G	G	G
Frozen vegetables	G	G	G	G
Other frozen food	G	G	G	G

2. Is there enough variety of fresh fruit and vegetables available in your store?

G Never G Sometimes G Most of the time G Always

3. Which of the following foods have you received as FOOD MAIL IN THE PAST MONTH (February)? (Check all that apply.)

- Fresh fruit: GApples GOranges GBananas GGrapes GBerries
 GKivi GPLums GMelons GGrapefruit GOther
- Fresh vegetables: GLettuce GBroccoli GTomatoes GCauliflower GTurnips
 GCabbage GOnions GPeppers GCarrots GPotatoes
 GCucumber GCelery GSquash GSpinach GMushrooms
- Milk products: GFresh milk G UHT milk GCheese GYogurt GIce cream
 GPowdered milk GEvaporated milk
- Frozen food: GFrozen meat GFrozen pizza GFrozen fish
 GFrench fries GOther frozen vegetables GFrozen juice

4. Since this time last year, has the quality of food in your store

- G improved a lot?
- G improved a little?
- G stayed the same?
- G become worse?

5. When do you find the quality of food to be best and worst?

- | <u>Best in</u> | <u>Worst in</u> |
|----------------|-----------------|
| G Spring | G Spring |
| G Summer | G Summer |
| G Fall | G Fall |
| G Winter | G Winter |

6. If the quality of fresh fruit and vegetables improved in your store, do you think you would you sell more of these foods?

- G Yes, a lot more G Yes, a bit more G No G Don't know

7. If the quality of the fresh food improved, would you:

- G increase prices, because customers would be willing to pay more?
- G lower prices, because you would have less spoilage?
- G continue to charge the same price?

8. How often do you get complaints from customers about food quality?

- G Never G Once in a while G Every week G Every day

9. What do you think is the main cause of the problems you have with the quality of fresh food at this time of the year?

- G Poor handling by the airline
- G Flight delays
- G Poor quality available from suppliers in Happy Valley-Goose Bay
- G Damage in getting the food from the airport to your store
- G Poor temperature control on the plane
- G Packaging not adequate
- G Storage facilities at the airport not adequate
- G Don't have problems with quality
- G Don't know
- G Other causes (please explain)

10. How much of the following foods have you thrown out because of poor quality or spoilage in a typical week DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS (December, January, February)?

	<u>Under 5%</u>	<u>5-10%</u>	<u>10-20%</u>	<u>20-40%</u>	<u>Over 40%</u>	<u>Don't sell</u>
Apples	G	G	G	G	G	G
Oranges, grapefruit	G	G	G	G	G	G
Bananas, grapes	G	G	G	G	G	G
Berries	G	G	G	G	G	G
Potatoes	G	G	G	G	G	G
Carrots, cabbage	G	G	G	G	G	G
Lettuce, peppers	G	G	G	G	G	G
Tomatoes	G	G	G	G	G	G
Fresh milk	G	G	G	G	G	G
Cheese, yogurt	G	G	G	G	G	G

	<u>Under 5%</u>	<u>5-10%</u>	<u>10-20%</u>	<u>20-40%</u>	<u>Over 40%</u>	<u>Don't sell</u>
Fresh meat	G	G	G	G	G	G
Frozen vegetables	G	G	G	G	G	G
Other frozen food	G	G	G	G	G	G

11. Can you list the foods where you have the greatest problem with quality?

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

12. Are there any fresh or frozen foods you would like to sell that are not usually available from your supplier?

G No

G Yes, Please name them:

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Your name: _____

Business name: _____

Community: _____