



COMMUNITY HARVEST ONTARIO

Backgrounder

IN BRIEF

Community Harvest Ontario is an innovative new program of the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) that will dramatically increase the amount of fresh, healthy, local food acquired and distributed by food banks across the province. Community Harvest Ontario builds partnerships with farmers and corporate partners to **grow, glean, and donate** local fruits and vegetables.

THE CHALLENGE

Ontario's food banks are faced with tremendous challenges. Hunger is a persistent problem, and we are still feeling the after-effects of the recession on the front line. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are forced to turn to food banks every month. This significant demand puts pressures on our food supply that was stretched over the recession by sharply rising numbers and closures of many major corporate food donors. As a result, food banks had to purchase more food and/or reduce the amount of food distributed. Beyond the basics of supply and demand, low-income individuals and families struggle to put good, healthy food on the table. We needed a comprehensive response to these multiple, connected challenges.

FACTS

- 375,000 Ontarians turn to food banks every month; 40 per cent of those served by food banks are children.
- Since 2008, we witnessed the closure of over ten major food processors and food manufacturing plants in communities across the province, the sum total of these closures meant an overall reduction in supply of one million pounds of food for Ontario's food banks.
- One in five food banks in Ontario do not have enough food to meet the needs of those they serve
- 72.4 per cent of Ontarians turning to food banks do not have access to the required servings of fruits and vegetables

THE OPPORTUNITY

While the challenges may be great, there is a solution in our backyard. It is estimated that province-wide approximately 25 million pounds of fruits and vegetables are disposed of or tilled back into the soil each year. Community Harvest Ontario builds the capacity of communities to gain access to this much-needed food. We accomplish this in three ways: grow, glean, and donate

GROW

We work with farmers on planting projects. Many farmers across Ontario are planting crops specifically for their local and area food banks. We help by

covering some of the costs of planting and harvesting, and by providing volunteers to assist with some of the work involved in growing fresh fruits and vegetables.

GROWING: PLAN B ORGANIC FARMS

Plan B is a CSA Farm located in Branchton. Their commitment to sustainable agriculture and local food banks has been recognized as groundbreaking by the Friends of Greenbelt Foundation. Plan B is a Community Harvest Ontario project site, working to supply fresh, nutritious, and local foods to the Hamilton Food



Share and local families who are forced to turn to food banks.

In 2010, Plan B is planting, cultivating, and harvesting 25 acres that will result in over 150,000 pounds of vegetables being delivered to Hamilton Food Share and other community food banks in the greater Hamilton area.

GLEAN

We connect volunteer groups with farms that have surplus produce in their fields. The volunteer groups travel to their assigned farm and pick the healthy, tasty, and edible food that remains on the land, a process known as gleaning. All of this food goes to local food banks.

GLEANING: WHITTAMORE'S FARM

Located in Ontario's Greenbelt, Whittamore's Farm is a 220 acre fruit and vegetable farm located in Markham. Known by many for their fantastic 'pick-your-own' strawberries, raspberries and pumpkins, Whittamore's is also one of the first Community Harvest Ontario farm locations.



In October of 2009, Whittamore's opened their fields to Community Harvest Ontario gleaners from Direct Energy who collected over 12,000 pounds of food in a single day. The food was picked up by local food banks who were able to distribute it to local families facing hunger in time for the Thanksgiving weekend. This successful initiative became the model for the Community Harvest Ontario gleaning program.

WHAT IS GLEANING? Gleaning is the activity of collecting crops that either remain after the harvest or are un-harvested due to cosmetic or financial reasons.

DONATE

We connect with farmers to acquire the product that can not make it to market for cosmetic reasons such as size, shape, or colour. These types of produce, called "seconds", are perfectly healthy, tasty, and fresh and would otherwise be disposed of. Through Community Harvest Ontario, we ensure that these foods make it to the 375,000 Ontarians who are forced to turn to food banks each month.



DONATING: NATURE FRESH FARMS

Located in Leamington, Nature Fresh Farms is Ontario's largest greenhouse grower with over 100 acres producing fresh peppers, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Peter Quiring, president of Nature Fresh Farms, is one of the trailblazers of the Community Harvest Ontario Program. In 2009, Nature Fresh Farms donated over 200,000 pounds of fresh peppers to food banks across the province. In 2010, Peter plans to more than double this contribution by committing to donate 600,000 of peppers and tomatoes.

COMMUNITY HARVEST ONTARIO FACTS

- In 2010, Community Harvest Ontario will acquire and distribute **over 500,000 pounds** of fresh fruits and vegetables; next year, that number will increase to over **2 million**;
- **Over 15 farms** have signed-up to participate in Community Harvest Ontario in lead-up to the program launch;
- Community Harvest Ontario will engage over 450 volunteers for a total of 3450 hours in 2010.

FOCUS AREAS

In the first year of the Community Harvest Ontario program, we will be concentrating our efforts in 5 areas across the province:

- Ottawa & area
- Hamilton & area
- London & area
- Thunder Bay & area
- Greater Toronto Area

Over the next three years, the Community Harvest Ontario program will be expanding to include communities throughout Ontario. However, interested farmers and volunteers are encouraged to contact us to learn about opportunities in their area.

PARTICIPATE

Farmers and volunteers who are interested in participating in Community Harvest Ontario are encouraged to contact us or visit our website www.communityharvest.ca. Our website allows interested volunteers to sign-up to form their own gleaning team, raise funds to support Community Harvest Ontario activities, be matched with an area farmer for a gleaning day, and post pictures of their gleaning trip. As well, farmers can sign up on our website to participate in any of our three types of projects.

GLEANING THEME DAYS

Community Harvest Ontario has two gleaning theme days planned for 2010. Gleaning the Greenbelt Day will engage youth and families in gleaning trips throughout Ontario's Greenbelt, this will take place on September 9th. The Community Harvest Ontario Corporate Challenge Day invites workplace volunteers to form gleaning teams which will head to the fields for a friendly competition on October 5th. If you are interested in participating in either of these days, please contact Todd Jaques at the Ontario Association of Food Banks or visit www.communityharvest.ca

PARTNERS

Community Harvest Ontario is made possible thanks to the generous support of the following foundations:

- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation
- The George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation

For more information on Community Harvest Ontario, please contact Todd Jaques at the Ontario Association of Food Banks at 416-656-4100 x2934 or visit www.communityharvest.ca