



Ontario Society of Nutrition
Professionals in Public Health

La société ontarienne des professionnel(le)s
de la nutrition en santé publique

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Hon. Jeff Leal
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
11th Floor, 77 Grenville Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1B3
Email: jleal.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org

Dear Minister Leal

We are writing in response to the news release, [Enjoy an Abundance of Local Goodness This Thanksgiving](#), issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on October 7. As registered dietitians, we encourage and support promotion of nutritious, Ontario-produced food and value the work that your Ministry does in this regard. However, we were disheartened with the suggestion in the news release to donate food items, money or time to food banks to give all Ontarians the opportunity to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal. This statement is false and perpetuates a myth that food charity is able to adequately respond to the food needs of vulnerable Ontarians.

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians working in Ontario's public health system. Our members are mandated by the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (OPHS) to provide healthy eating expertise on programs and services that aim to support healthy growth and development and reduce chronic diseases. One of the requirements of the OPHS is to, "monitor food affordability in accordance with the Nutritious Food Basket Protocol" (OPHS, p. 28).

Nutritious Food Basket survey results provide a measure of the cost of healthy eating and are applied to various family and individual income scenarios to assess the likelihood of being able to purchase nutritious food when the cost of housing is considered. Year after year the results of local analyses by public health units consistently show that households with low incomes are unlikely to have enough money to purchase basic nutritious food and are likely experiencing food insecurity or food poverty – inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

According to data reported in [Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2013](#), 624,200 Ontario households (12.5%) or 1.6 million people in 2013 experienced some degree of food insecurity, defined as worrying about running out of food (marginal food insecurity); compromising quantity or quality of food consumed (moderate food insecurity); or reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to lack of food (severe food insecurity). For almost one in 10 Ontario households, the food insecurity situation was moderate or severe in 2013. The prevalence of food insecurity in Ontario in 2013 was the highest since consistent monitoring of food insecurity in Canada began in 2005.



This raises significant concern for the impact on health care costs given that health is tightly linked to household food insecurity. Adults in food insecure households have poorer mental and physical health, poorer oral health, greater stress and are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and anxiety. Being food insecure is strongly associated with becoming a high-cost user of health care.

In 2015, OSNPPPH released a [Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity](#) emphasizing that the only solution to food insecurity is an income response and that food charity is an ineffective and counterproductive response to food insecurity. Food charity does not address the root cause which is poverty, and perpetuates the misconception that food insecurity is being adequately addressed by communities. While hundreds of thousands of Ontarians use food banks, they only represent about 25% of those who experience food insecurity. Most Ontarians who experience food insecurity do not go to food banks because of their many limitations. For these reasons, we respectfully suggest that the Ontario government stop promoting food charity as an effective response to food poverty.

The growth of food charity has been linked to a reduction in social programs as governments abandon previously-held responsibilities for the well-being of citizens and rely on charity to fill gaps. While food charity may help to relieve immediate hunger in those who seek assistance, food insecurity persists. To effectively address food insecurity, income responses, such as those presented in our discussion paper [Income-Related Policy Recommendations to Address Food Insecurity](#), are required.

OSNPPPH looks forward to progress by the Ontario government on the Basic Income pilot that was announced in the 2016 Ontario Budget and the enactment of Bill 6 that calls for the establishment a Social Assistance Research Commission. These developments have the potential to address largely preventable health and social problems in Ontario.

Sincerely

Candice Einstoss, RD
Co-chair, OSNPPPH

Mary Ellen Prange, RD
OSNPPH Food Security Workgroup

cc. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Helena Jaczek, Minister of Community and Social Services
Hon. Chris Ballard, Minister of Housing and Minister Responsible for the
Poverty Reduction Strategy
Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care