

# Toronto's Food Charter

*In 1976, Canada signed the United Nations Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, which includes "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger." The City of Toronto supports our national commitment to food security, and the following beliefs:*

*Every Toronto resident should have access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food.*

*Food security contributes to the health and well-being of residents while reducing their need for medical care.*

*Food is central to Toronto's economy, and the commitment to food security can strengthen the food sector's growth and development.*

*Food brings people together in celebrations of community and diversity and is an important part of the city's culture.*

*Therefore, to promote food security, Toronto City Council will:*

- ❁ champion the right of all residents to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally-acceptable food without the need to resort to emergency food providers
- ❁ advocate for income, employment, housing, and transportation policies that support secure and dignified access to the food people need
- ❁ support events highlighting the city's diverse and multicultural food traditions
- ❁ promote food safety programs and services
- ❁ sponsor nutrition programs and services that promote healthy growth and help prevent diet-related diseases
- ❁ ensure convenient access to an affordable range of healthy foods in city facilities
- ❁ adopt food purchasing practices that serve as a model of health, social and environmental responsibility
- ❁ partner with community, cooperative, business and government organizations to increase the availability of healthy foods
- ❁ encourage community gardens that increase food self-reliance, improve fitness, contribute to a cleaner environment, and enhance community development
- ❁ protect local agricultural lands and support urban agriculture
- ❁ encourage the recycling of organic materials that nurture soil fertility
- ❁ foster a civic culture that inspires all Toronto residents and all city departments to support food programs that provide cultural, social, economic and health benefits
- ❁ work with community agencies, residents' groups, businesses and other levels of government to achieve these goals.

## Towards a food-secure city

Canada's National Action Plan for Food Security states that "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."<sup>1</sup>

In May 2000, Toronto City Council voted unanimously to become a food-secure city that would strive to ensure:

- ☛ the availability of a variety of foods at a reasonable cost
- ☛ ready access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternative food sources
- ☛ sufficient personal income to buy adequate foods for each household member each day
- ☛ the freedom to choose personally- and culturally-acceptable foods
- ☛ legitimate confidence in the quality of the foods available
- ☛ easy access to understandable, accurate information about food and nutrition
- ☛ the assurance of a viable and sustainable food production system.

## Ten reasons why

### Toronto supports food security

Food is a need all people share. So is the need for food security. Food security is not someone else's problem. Nor is it a problem that can be safely ignored by anyone or any government. If our city depends on imports for basic staples, we have a food security problem. If foods aren't labelled accurately so people know exactly what's in them, we have a food security problem. If foods aren't properly

inspected, we have a food security problem. If topsoil erodes and water tables are polluted, future food security is threatened. If healthy foods aren't affordable, we're all just one layoff, one divorce, one major accident or illness away from food insecurity.

Food security, however, is not just a set of problems. It creates opportunities. There are at least ten good reasons why investments in food security are among the smartest ethical investments a city can make, and why Toronto is starting to make those investments now.

#### ***1. Food security means no-one in the city goes to bed hungry.***

Toronto tries to be a city where everyone belongs, feels part of a larger community and has an opportunity to contribute. It does not want to be a city torn between haves and have-nots. The decision to make Toronto a food-secure city acknowledges that each of us is affected by the well-being of others. International studies show that people from all income groups are healthier when people from low-income groups are also healthy.<sup>2</sup> Some people see this commitment as a matter of conscience and respect for human rights. Some see it as enlightened self-interest and respect for the conditions that create a safe and liveable city. Either way, food security is essential to an open, peaceable and civil city Torontonians can take pride in.

#### ***2. Food security makes the city more affordable.***

Toronto is one of the few world cities in which people from all walks of life can still afford to set up home and raise families. But

<sup>1</sup>Canada's Action Plan for Food Security: A Response to the World Food Summit, 1998.

<sup>2</sup>For example, the poorest people in Sweden are healthier, on average, than the richest people in England. See Dennis Raphael, "Public Health Responses to Health Inequalities," *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, November-December 1998, page 89; R.G. Wilkinson, *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1996); D. Vagero et al., "Health Inequalities in Britain and Sweden," *The Lancet*, 1989, no. 2, pages 35-36; D. Loon et al., "Social Class Differences in Infant Mortality in Sweden: A Comparison with England and Wales," *British Medical Journal*, 1992, vol., 305, pages 687-91.

it's an expensive place to live. During the 1990s, despite the boom in some economic sectors, the number of Toronto families living in poverty increased, both absolutely and relatively. Food banks, created as a short-term stopgap during the 1980s, became permanent fixtures in the city.

Measures that enable people to buy and prepare healthy but inexpensive food, or to grow some of their own food, help make the city more affordable to everyone.

### **3. Food security means every child gets a head start.**

Kids need a nourishing breakfast and a good lunch to get the most from their school day. Research proves that child nutrition and learning are closely linked, and that childhood nutritional shortcomings can last a lifetime. That's why school nutrition programs are well established across Europe and the United States.

Canada is the only western industrialized country that does not have a national child nutrition program. But Toronto gives 65,000 children a head start on their day and their life with school breakfast, snack and lunch programs supported by the city, province, volunteers and local businesses.

### **4. Food security saves on medical care.**

A healthy diet is the most cost-effective form of health care available. Heart disease, strokes, diabetes and cancer, all of which are related to diet, cost Toronto \$491 million a year in medical bills and lost productivity. Many worry that a public and universal health care system cannot sustain the burden of expensive treatments of preventable diseases. To protect Canada's health care system, especially as the population ages and chronic diseases peak, nutrition needs to be treated as a first line of defence.

### **5. Food security means more local jobs.**

Unlike people in many world cities, Torontonians rely almost entirely on food trucked from thousands of kilometres away. That means Toronto's food dollars travel thousands of kilometres to create jobs elsewhere.

It doesn't have to be that way, especially in a region that has the best farmland in Canada. As recently as 1960, most of Toronto's food came from within 350 kilometres of the city limits. If even 1.5 % of Toronto's surface area were made available to market gardeners and greenhouse operators, we could create a \$16 million a year industry growing 10% of our city's fresh vegetables. A combination of vacant, under-used land and flat empty roofs makes that goal achievable.

### **6. Food security is environmentally friendly.**

The more we rely on the Greater Toronto Area for food, the more we will enjoy fresh air and clean water.

Since plants store carbon dioxide and release oxygen, gardens improve air quality. Local growers also reduce the need to bring in food by truck. Trucks burn 10 times more energy in transit than is in the food itself. Growing 10% of our vegetables in the city would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 37.9 kilotonnes a year, help meet Toronto's commitments to reduce global warming, and avoid more than \$5 million in environmental costs.<sup>3</sup>

Plants also absorb rain, and keep rainwater out of the sewage system, where it's difficult and costly to treat. Rooftop gardens collect rainfall, and lower a building's heating and cooling needs. Putting gardens on top of 20% of the city-owned buildings in Toronto

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<sup>3</sup>Calculations provided by Rod MacRae, Ph.D., food policy advisor, at the request of the Toronto Food and Hunger Action Committee.

would add 16 hectares of green space to the city, providing food, oxygen and better stormwater control.

**7. Food security reduces traffic pollution.**

Unlike many U.S. cities, Toronto boasts quality food stores within easy reach of most people. That's an amenity worth protecting.

The trend in food retail is to larger stores surrounded by huge parking lots, usually away from populated areas. As a result, people without cars are at a disadvantage, while shoppers with cars add to traffic jams and pollution. In a food-secure Toronto, people will live within walking distance of a food store and have the opportunity to exercise when they do their shopping errands.

**8. Food security is good business.**

Food processing, the city's largest industry sector, employs 40,000 workers. More than 120,000 people have food-related jobs, in restaurants, shops or marketing. Job security in these businesses depends on customers with food security.<sup>4</sup>

Toronto could create even more jobs by supplying more of its own food needs. It has a diverse and cosmopolitan populace that isn't always served by mass market products. Some people require halal or kosher meats. Vegetarians, vegans and people with food sensitivities and allergies all have special needs. These people support small, community-based processors who specialize in filling their special needs. These small companies create food security for their employees and customers.

**9. Food security means waste not, want not.**

A typical family of four generates a tonne of food and packaging waste a year. Most of it is carted away to landfill sites, at about \$60

a tonne. What we waste could be turned into any number of resources, including methane for clean fuel, livestock feed, or compost to enrich gardens. A city that is food-secure knows the difference between waste and the feedstock for another business or project.

Toronto has many resources waiting to be used. There is idle land that could be made into gardens, and greenhouses that lie empty for part of the year. Those gardens could use recycled water and rain for irrigation. The greenhouses can use waste heat coming from power plants and boilers. Food security is about not throwing opportunities away.

**10. Food security is neighbourly.**

People from all cultures build communities around food. Seder ceremonies, Eid-al-Fitr festivities, Caribana picnics, family dinners at Thanksgiving, wedding feasts, anniversary banquets... most people celebrate special events by breaking bread with companions — the word companion comes from the Latin for "with" and "bread." Community gardens also bring people together in a project that beautifies and enlivens a neighbourhood.

Some elderly or disabled residents rarely enjoy eating with friends and neighbours, but find it difficult to get around, and so often eat alone. In a food-secure Toronto, they will enjoy more opportunities to join others for a meal.

Toronto is the name its original inhabitants used for "meeting place." Food honours that tradition, and helps keep Toronto a place where people of many cultures and values enrich the city with their distinctive variations on our common human needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Kyle Benham, "An Economic Development Strategy for the Toronto Food Sector," City of Toronto, May 1998.