



Building Ontario's First Food Security Strategy Discussion Paper

Feedback from *The SEED*,

A community food project of the Guelph Community Health Centre

On behalf of The SEED, thank you to the Government of Ontario for working towards Ontario's First Food Security Strategy. This is a significant step forward for Ontario. Congratulations on having the vision to pursue this.

The SEED is a community food project of the Guelph Community Health Centre working to resolve issues related to food insecurity. We utilize social enterprises, community partners and innovation to work towards a healthy and equitable food system. There are three pillars to our work: food access, food literacy, and food advocacy/outreach.

Knowing that you will be receiving many comments on this discussion paper, we have limited our feedback to the short points below. We are pleased to have been involved in a regional roundtable discussion about this issue, participated in the Guelph Wellington Taskforce for Poverty Elimination's submission, and met with Minister Ballard when he visited the Guelph Community Health Centre in May 2017. We welcome you to contact us should you wish to follow up with us in a more intensive manner.

We believe that The SEED's experience with food insecurity in Guelph is provincially relevant. Learning from what is happening in Guelph could be very beneficial in formulating Ontario's First Food Security Strategy.

Strong points of the discussion paper that The SEED endorses

1. A community approach to food insecurity is the most effective way to make positive change. Empowering communities and community organizations is an important aspect of food security, given the barriers to healthy food created by lack of local employment and chronic social isolation. Each community has an important role to play in supporting food security for its members, and government should be providing resources to support the success of that work.
2. Emphasizing innovation and social enterprise is a powerful strategy for addressing food insecurity. The discussion paper mentions work such as "good food boxes, community freezers, and mobile markets", all of which are being run by The SEED as social enterprises in Guelph. We believe that social enterprises like these can play a big role in reducing food insecurity in communities across Ontario by increasing local employment and reducing social isolation. More details of our work can be found at www.theseedguelph.ca and in the submission from the Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination.

What needs more clarity

1. A clearer division of responsibility between the provincial government and community organizations. The discussion paper emphasizes that community organizations should work in a

focused way to resolve the root causes of food insecurity. While we agree that each community has its own unique food insecurity problems and therefore must come up with its own unique solutions, we believe that what is missing from the discussion paper is a commitment from the government to:

- a) Clearly define province-wide food security metrics and targets (e.g. “We will measure XYZ in order to determine whether or not we are achieving food insecurity reduction on a community level and provincially.”).
 - b) Create funding streams that ensure that community organizations are properly resourced to reduce food insecurity on the local level.
2. A clearer plan for increasing people’s ability to afford good food. Making food more affordable is mentioned several times throughout the discussion paper, and while making food cheaper would increase the amount of groceries that food insecure individuals and families could buy, it should not be done at the expense of Ontario farmers. We believe that raising income (e.g. higher minimum wage) is the most impactful way to reduce food insecurity. While we are encouraged by the Government’s commitment to piloting Basic Guaranteed Income, we believe that an effective Food Security Strategy will need to go beyond pilot measures.

What is missing

1. Explicit commitment to tangible solutions. There should be greater focus on and description of the Government of Ontario’s own efforts, which includes: (1) Supporting community organizations financially (particularly Community Food Center models); (2) Committing to strategies to increase household income (such as the Basic Income Pilot); (3) Implementing thorough research on food security indicators to better track progress and shortfalls made both by the government and local organizations.
2. Strategies for addressing barriers to food sovereignty. The discussion paper mentions working with Indigenous partners for stewardship of natural food resources, which certainly must include land protection, but there is no mention of a strategy in which the government is pursuing this. Culturally appropriate food is an aspect of food sovereignty and is mentioned in the report, but we need also to focus on other aspects of food sovereignty, especially *how* people are able to access their food. This is particularly important for First Nations populations and immigrants and includes environmental protection and agricultural sustainability as food security practices.

On behalf of The SEED’s Steering Committee and our community members,

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