



Food Matters Manitoba COVID-19 Food Security Call to Action

May 20, 2020

Food Matters Manitoba is leading the way for provincial food security with a mandate to build a province where good food nourishes strong communities and healthy people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing inequities in our communities and revealed cracks in the foundations of our food system.

Although this situation has certainly affected us all, we know that those with the least economic cushion in this time of uncertainty are feeling it most. People living in Northern and remote communities, low-wage earners, those living in poverty, and minority and racialized groups are most impacted. Unforeseen job loss, food shortages and higher prices will only continue to widen this disparity between those who can afford food and those struggling to meet basic needs.

In Manitoba, we rely greatly on a strong regional food supply chain and we would like to extend our appreciation for those who have been working so courageously to ensure that food and other necessities are available in our communities.

Although global disruptions have caused rippling effects, the Provincial Government has been quick to protect this asset by defining farmers' markets as essential businesses and supporting an online software development for farm to consumer purchasing. The Federal Government has ensured financial care packages in good time to vulnerable populations.

We also acknowledge the invaluable efforts of those who have come together in this time to work towards systems change to eradicate poverty and build a thriving food system that honors food and farm workers, elevates our local economies and nourishes all people.

These unprecedented times have seen unparalleled cooperation and innovation from business, government, service providers and consumers and as we move forward in recovery we have a unique opportunity to shift the needle towards a more equitable, resilient and sustainable food system.

We are hopeful that the collaborations and partnerships developed in response to current challenges will continue beyond this crisis to co-create multi-sector solutions that include Municipal, Provincial, Federal and First Nations governments, food producers and distributors, health authorities, environment and wildlife conservators, educators, economic planners, urban developers, community serving businesses, organizations and affected individuals.

It is imperative that we work in solidarity to advance comprehensive strategies and policies that address the root causes of household food security, respect Indigenous food sovereignty, and result in more sustainable food systems.

HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY

We commend the Government of Canada on its quick delivery of the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) and support for emergency food distribution, helping to ensure that families can continue to put good food on their tables during the pandemic.

We commend the coordinated efforts of non-profit, civil society and public sector to help ensure that emergency food relief is provided to the increasing number of people who are food insecure.

We ask the Government of Canada to expand the CERB to a universal basic income for all Canadians to ensure that all families can afford basic needs and access income support in a non-invasive, user-friendly, and dignified way, without compromising access to other essential and equity promoting social services.

We ask the Government of Manitoba to immediately increase Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) rates by \$300 per person, per month for those on EIA who do not qualify for CERB and to keep EIA files open for those who receive CERB during the COVID-19 pandemic; going forward, **we ask the Government of Manitoba** to implement a EIA livable basic needs benefit, indexed to inflation, that ensures no Manitoba family lives in poverty.

We ask that all sectors and all levels of government commit to No Poverty and Zero Hunger through measures that draw attention to, and directly address, the root causes of household food insecurity, and in particular, the lack of adequate income to acquire enough food.

INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

We commend the Government of Manitoba for its contribution to food security in Northern Indigenous Communities through the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, which supports the development of local food production and distribution projects that feed people and build community resilience.

We ask the Government of Manitoba to increase the amount of funding available to Northern Healthy Food Initiative communities to address immediate food security needs and ensure the long-term viability of local food growing, harvesting, processing and distribution, training and skills development, local employment opportunities, and fair compensation to harvesters and producers.

We ask the Governments of Canada and Manitoba to partner with Indigenous Nations, communities and rightsholders on an Indigenous-led process to identify and remove policy barriers to cultivating, harvesting, and distributing traditional and country foods.

We ask the Government of Canada to commit to an effective Northern food security program led by Indigenous and Northern peoples that respects local food traditions, enhances regional capacity for harvesting, production and processing, and ensures that everyone has access to good food regardless of geography and transportation options.

We ask all levels of Canadian government and all settler society sectors, agencies and organizations to respect the autonomy of Indigenous Nations to determine their own food systems and solutions, pursue partnerships that advance Indigenous leadership and prioritize local knowledge, and take concrete steps towards realizing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

We commend the Government of Manitoba on its commitment to supporting direct farm marketing and recognizing the essential nature of garden centres and services.

We ask the Government of Manitoba to commit to the long-term viability of our food systems and local producers by funding and supporting strategies for vibrant local food economies that result in fair compensation for food producers and food workers, increased local capacity for food production and processing, training and employment opportunities, and enhanced community health.

We ask the Government of Canada to provide adequate financial relief and regulatory guidance to the food production, distribution, and retail sectors, including small-scale producers and small business, to ensure the personal health and safety and food security of food producers and food workers now and in the long-term.

We ask all sectors and all levels of government to prioritize procurement of goods and services, especially food and food services, from local and small businesses whenever possible.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

We ask all sectors and all levels of government to work cooperatively to develop a province-wide network and broad consultation towards a coordinated, multi-sector provincial food strategy that ensures universal access to nutritious, culturally-appropriate food, improves the health and well-being of the people of Manitoba, strengthens local food economies, and is resilient to the shocks and stresses of our unprecedented times.

Food Matters Manitoba

foodmattersmanitoba.ca

info@foodmattersmanitoba.ca