



BORIS SPIRNO/TORONTO STAR

**HARVEST BOUNTY:** Volunteers Francine Little and Harold (who didn't want his last name used) unload fresh produce at warehouse.

# Affordable fruits, vegetables bonus for food bank clients

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When Shirley Trites lost her job as a security guard last year, her sudden drop in income often meant visiting a food bank at the end of the month to make ends meet.

But this weekend Trites has a fridge full of fresh Ontario fruits and vegetables that she proudly paid for herself.

No, she didn't win a lottery. She's joined an innovative nutrition project called Field to Table. And it's turning the food bank concept on its ear.

The project, run by FoodShare, a non-profit group dedicated to ending hunger and improving access to affordable, nutritious food, operates much like a real bank.

At the beginning of every month when welfare and unemployment cheques arrive, customers pay \$15 to order a large box of fresh, top-quality produce, aptly named The Good Food Box. Boxes for singles cost \$10.

During the third week of the month, when money is typically in short supply for low-income people, project staff and volunteers deliver the boxes to apartment lobbies or community centres near customers' homes.

"It's the greatest thing," Trites enthused this week as she picked up her shipment of red peppers, pears, apples, carrots, corn and other fresh goodies at her Sherbourne St. Cityhome building. "It really helps me out this time of month because I'm always broke."

And, like most of the 408 families and single people across Metro who received food boxes this week, Trites doesn't mind paying for her groceries.

"I actually prefer this, because everything is really fresh and it's helped me to work out a budget," she said.

Many low-income families don't think they can afford fresh fruit and vegetables, said project manager Mary Lou Morgan, who started Riverdale's highly successful Big Carrot natural food store on Danforth Ave. in the 1980s.

"This project shows people that they can afford fresh produce and it encourages them to include more fruits and vegetables in their diet," she said.

It's also a great bargain.

Since the produce is bought in bulk, in season, and directly from farmers at the Ontario Food Terminal, it's cheaper than anything Trites could get at her neighborhood grocery

store.

"I've priced this very same food at the No Frills store and I would pay at least twice as much," she said.

The beauty of the project is that everybody saves money.

From Morgan's past work at the Big Carrot, she knows the value of buying only what you need, in bulk, as directly as possible from the farm.

Buying corn in large bins, for example, cuts the wholesale cost of each cob to 11 cents from 17 cents. Three pounds of apples cost 77 cents in bulk at

the food terminal. By contrast, a grocery store would pay as much as \$1.50 wholesale for a 3-pound bag.

Those savings enable Morgan to buy the food for between \$11 and \$12 a box. The extra \$3 to \$4 profit helps pay staff salaries, gas for the delivery truck and other costs.

The truck, a \$50,000 state-of-the-art refrigerated cube van, was donated by union workers at General Motors' Scarborough van plant and the Canadian Auto Workers' social justice fund.

Costs are further defrayed by

free use of a vacant City of Toronto warehouse on Front St. E. and a team of dedicated volunteers who help load the boxes.

The project is subsidized by a \$25,000 provincial agriculture ministry grant, \$40,000 from FoodShare and another \$40,000 from corporations and foundations. Two of the six staff salaries are offset by various unemployment insurance and welfare training programs.

But Morgan is hoping the project will eventually pay for itself.

Mary Crowe, president of the tenants' association in Trites' building, said she has no trouble collecting money for the boxes.

"We have a lot of seniors and single moms in this building who can't often get out to the grocery store, so the delivery is a real plus," she said.

Gerard Kennedy, executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, thinks that between 10 and 20 per cent of food bank users — those who have stable housing and income — could easily move into the program.

Field to Table is open to communities of all incomes that want access to high quality fruits and vegetables at affordable prices. For more information, call 392-1658.

## Help to fight osteoporosis

The Osteoporosis Society needs volunteers to help in its mission to educate people on how to prevent and treat the brittle bone disease that mainly affects elderly women.

It needs people to handle requests for information, operate a telephone information line, mount exhibits, do clerical work and help in public relations. It also needs people fluent in French.

Volunteers for the informa-

tion line need to take training a half-day a week for eight weeks and all volunteers are asked to commit themselves for at least six months.

Anyone able to help should call the Volunteer Centre of Metro Toronto at 961-6888, North York at 631-6117, Scarborough at 264-2308, York at 658-6160, East York at 467-1327 or Etobicoke at 236-0683, weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Pearson airport and downtown Toronto — long the desire of transit boosters — is an expensive dream that wouldn't attract enough riders to be feasible, a provincial report suggests.

A more realistic trade-off would be to improve GO train service on a nearby line and run buses from a GO station into the airport, the report says.

## Police identify woman found dead

Metro police have identified the body of an elderly woman found Sunday under the Meadowvale bridge just north of Sheppard Ave. E. in Scarborough as that of 77-year-old Maria Tacchi. Detective John Bortoluss said Tacchi died of a heart attack.

## Gunns Rd. to be extended

The Ontario government has announced the extension of Gunns Rd. as the next step in redevelopment of the Ontario Stock Yards site. Funding for the construction will come from a \$3 million loan the government gave in June to the Ontario Stock Yards board.

## Morin's appeal begins Jan. 23

Guy Paul Morin's appeal of his murder conviction is to begin in the Ontario Court of Appeal Jan. 23. The argument is scheduled for 10 days.

Ontario Chief Justice Charles Dubin met yesterday with crown and defence lawyers involved with the Morin case. Morin, now 35, was convicted in July, 1992, of first-degree murder in the death of Christine Jessop, 9.

## York councillor's case adjourned

A York Region councillor from Markham appeared in court yesterday on municipal corruption charges and had his case adjourned. Gordon Landon, 46, was ordered to stand trial last month on three counts of fraud over \$1,000, three counts of theft over \$1,000, three counts of uttering a forged document and one count of breach of trust.