



FoodShare Toronto Submission to  
UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter  
Economic Accessibility and the Right to Food Meeting, May 9, 2012

## **The Canadian Crisis of Food Security: Building a Public Food System**

### **Summary**

Increasing numbers of people in Canada face growing food insecurity. Action is needed to make a commitment to food as a basic human right.

The government of Canada can learn from strong local and international initiatives and increase Canadian food security through establishing a Ministry of Food Security, strengthening the social safety net to reduce hunger, and implementing a National Student Nutrition Program.

Successful food security initiatives and programs around the world recognize that public measures enhance economic accessibility and the right to food. In Brazil, the country credited with doing more than any other jurisdiction in implementing programs that reduce hunger, a multi-faceted group of programs have been implemented which include income transfers **and** subsidized food programming. Increased incomes are seen as going hand in hand with the creation of a Public Subsidized Food System including universal student nutrition programs, subsidized open-air “sacalao markets” and subsidized restaurants which serve quality low-cost meals.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1) Create a Ministry of Food Security**

A federal ministry is needed to plan how every Canadian will eat each day and how we could grow and produce enough food nationally to feed our population.

This Ministry would be vital in establishing a public food system built on principles of sustainability, quality and enhanced access to ensure universal availability of a range of locally produced healthy food essentials at a low price. It could also support Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) tax incentives that support farmers who use sustainable growing practices, and explore developing other creative programs to support farmers who grow food for local consumption.

For example, Brazil’s Zero Hunger program has done a great deal to reduce hunger and increase market share for small farmers by creating public food programs including universal student nutrition programs and “sacalao markets,” open air public markets operated by the municipal government where food is half the price charged in markets run by the private sector. The Brazilian experience points to the potential for Canada to build multi-faceted programs for a public food system.

#### **2) Strengthen the social safety net to reduce hunger**

Programs are needed to make sure that provinces and territories invest in housing, child care, health care, dental care as well as food. Canada should bring back the Canada Assistance Plan, a social safety net below which no citizen can fall.

The fight to reduce income inequality and raise basic income levels deserves the continued support of all who care about social justice. At the same time, there is an important opportunity to address the triple crisis of the food system – food and income, food and health, food and agriculture – with the goal of creating a new public food system.

For example, India’s Kerala State maintained a successful universal program in which rice and a variety of grains were available through all food stores at fixed low rates, while the government paid farmers a stable higher market rate for these items. Imagine if the Canadian government distributed

\$100 of “Public Food Vouchers” to every adult each month, redeemable at grocery stores or farmers’ markets for locally produced unprocessed foods such as vegetables, fruits, meats, cheeses, beans and grains. The vouchers could then be taxed back on a graduated sliding scale from those with higher incomes.

In Toronto, FoodShare’s Good Food Box program sells high quality fresh produce at reduced rates through community drop offs that are open to people of all incomes. Customers purchase produce at wholesale prices, while overhead costs are covered by individual donations and government grants. Another FoodShare program, Good Food Markets, delivers the same produce and reduced prices to community organizers who then operate their own community markets in low income neighbourhoods, facilitating piece-by-piece access at an even lower price point.

Further establishing and supporting the delivery of programs like these at a national level would help strengthen the social safety net to reduce hunger through increased universal access to fresh healthy food.

### **3) Implement a National Student Nutrition Program**

The federal government needs to work with the provinces and territories to implement a universal student nutrition program to encourage young people to eat healthy local food at school and at home and create a foundation for healthy, engaged and socialized communities.

Student nutrition programs provide low cost subsidized food for school aged children and ensure an adequate intake of appropriate nutrients and vitamins early enough in the day to prepare the body and mind to be alert and ready for learning and active participation in the classroom. An independent national survey conducted for FoodShare by opinion research firm Strategic Communications in early 2010, showed almost three fifths of respondents endorsed the creation of a National Student Nutrition Program. A cost-shared model should be developed for Student Nutrition programs in Canada through negotiations between the federal government, provinces, municipal governments, parents and students.

Student nutrition programs also have some less concrete but equally important benefits for participants and communities. They are a vehicle to provide food skills training, overall Food Literacy and socialization of participants and volunteers alike and recent supply-chain innovations also indicate that these programs can provide new markets and fair prices in support of national and provincial farming communities.

### **Background**

For more information on the initiatives described here, please refer to the attached backgrounder, Field, D. (2009). *The Crisis of Food Security: Building a Public Food System*. Esurio: Journal of Hunger and Poverty, 1(2).

### **Conclusion**

FoodShare Toronto recommends that the federal government commit to the human right to food and to building a Public Food System through creating a Ministry of Food Security, strengthening the social safety net to reduce hunger by supporting provinces and municipalities, and implementing a National Student Nutrition Program.

These recommendations are substantiated by local and international programs currently working to increase the right to food and a public food system.

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