

Peterborough Community Food Network

June 6, 2013

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C.
Prime Minister of Canada
c/o Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

On behalf of the Peterborough Community Food Network (PCFN), I am writing to you to express concern and hope about the right to food in Canada. The PCFN is comprised of numerous community organizations and individuals working together to ensure immediate, day-to-day and long-term food security for the people of Peterborough and the surrounding counties.

As you are aware, on March 4 of this year the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, presented his report based on his mission to Canada. He cited Health Canada statistics indicating that in 2007/8 there was an alarming excess of 1.92 million people in Canada living in households lacking food security. The PCFN is particularly concerned about the high vulnerability to food insecurity among Aboriginal people, social assistance recipients, new immigrants, single woman-led households and people living on low incomes.

The PCFN fully endorses the recommendations set out by the Special Rapporteur. Like Food Secure Canada, we strongly support his recommendation for a “comprehensive rights-based national food strategy” that includes specific attention to children’s right to food. Such a strategy must be informed by the voices of those most affected by food insecurity and would be strengthened by drawing on the work of civil society groups such as the People’s Food Policy Project.

We are particularly aware of the relationship between food insecurity, income insecurity and the high costs of housing. For instance, as you will see in the attached table (*Table 1: Peterborough Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios*), low incomes are preventing people from affording sufficient, nutritious food. After people on low incomes pay their rent and utility bills, they often have to borrow from their food budget to pay for other essential monthly expenses. 10% of Peterborough households worried about or experienced a lack of food, or compromised the quality or variety of food they ate. Therefore, this speaks to the need for a national housing strategy with federal leadership to encourage the development of more affordable housing across the country.

Finally, the Special Rapporteur saw promise in the work of local food systems and food policy councils. We encourage the Government to support the work of civil society groups working for inclusive and democratic solutions for universal food security in Canada.

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The PCFN hopes that the Government will act upon the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur. We look forward to seeing Canada's progress on the right to food and would be pleased to engage in dialogue or collaboration towards this end.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Rosana Pellizzari, MS, MSc, CCFP, FRCPC
Chair, Peterborough Community Food Network
Medical Officer of Health, Peterborough County-City Health Unit

/at

Encl.

cc: Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health
Hon. John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network

Table 1: May 2012 Peterborough Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios

Monthly Income/ Expenses	Single Man	Single Man	Single Elderly Woman	Single Parent Family of 3	Family of 4	Family of 4
Monthly Income – after tax; includes fed/prov benefits and tax credits	\$642 (Ontario Works)	\$1,115 (Ontario Disability Support Program)	\$1,326 (Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement)	\$1,855 (Ontario Works)	\$2,639 (Min. Wage)	\$6360 (Ontario median)
Rent –may or may not include heat/hydro)	\$639	\$774	\$774	\$915	\$1,101	\$1,397
Food – based on Canada’s Food Guide	\$264	\$264	\$196	\$599	\$790	\$790
What’s Left?	-\$261	\$77	\$356	\$341	\$748	\$4173
% income required for nutritious food	41%	24%	15%	32%	30%	12%

Poverty is the reason some people are going hungry in Peterborough. Low incomes do not measure up to the costs of choosing a healthy life. After people pay rent and utility bills, it is likely that they will have to borrow from their food budget, to pay for other essential monthly expenses. The people in 10% of Peterborough households worried about not having enough to eat, compromised the quality or variety of food eaten, or did not have enough to eat because of a lack of money.

Sources:

Ontario Public Health Assn. Food Security Work Group, “May 2012 Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios”, August 2012.

Peterborough County-City Health Unit, “May 2012 Peterborough Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios”, August 2012

Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2009-2010, Statistics Canada, Share File, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care