



October 30, 2013

Dear Ministers Teresa Piruzza and Ted McMeekin,

Re: Renewal of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

In response to the call for consultations regarding the renewal of Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy underway, members of Sustain Ontario (a project of Tides Canada Initiatives Society) and the Ontario Edible Education Network would like to first acknowledge the gains that have resulted from the Government's 2008 strategy 'Breaking the Cycle', including the countless meals and snacks provided to children and youth as a result of the strategy's provision of funding for the Ontario Student Nutrition Program.

In looking forward, we would like to recommend that the Government of Ontario use a variety of approaches to ensure that all families have access to healthy food. This will involve, at the forefront, significant inter-ministerial collaboration to bring about a healthy food system. It will involve advancing a number of the policy initiatives that are currently underway in an integrated manner, including the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Healthy Kids Strategy, Education Strategy, and Local Food Act.

Alleviating hunger plays a major role in the reduction of poverty. There are a number of ways in which members of Sustain Ontario and the Ontario Edible Education Network would like to see the Government of Ontario support families to have access to nutritious, healthy food.

Increase Individual and Household Food Security

First and foremost, individuals and families need to have access to enough healthy, fresh, and culturally appropriate food every day. We ask the Government of Ontario to:

- Support the implementation of an Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy to ensure an integrated and complementary approach to reducing hunger, supporting healthy eating, reducing chronic disease and health-related illnesses, and addressing other aspects of our food system.
- Support policies to improve individual and household income to enable low-income residents to afford healthy food (e.g. adequate minimum wage and social service allotment, affordable housing, affordable childcare, seniors care, public transportation, education and training, and employment).
- Ensure access to nutritious food for all Ontarians by using the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket (calculated annually by each Public Health Unit) in determining the rates for social assistance and the minimum wage and in the formation of ODSP/Social Diet Allowance payouts.
- Support community food programs (initiatives that help individuals and families not only access healthy food but also learn how to prepare it and make healthy food choices).

Continue to Provide Support for and Expand the Ontario Student Nutrition Program

We congratulate the Government on its recent announcement that it will invest an additional \$3 million in Ontario's Student Nutrition Programs to support kids in higher-needs communities and First Nations communities. Student Nutrition Programs empower vulnerable, low-income children, youth and their communities to adopt healthy eating practices and to ensure that students can focus on learning instead of being hungry.

- We recommend that the Government of Ontario continue to support Student Nutrition Programs until all Ontario schools have the funds and infrastructure needed to run a Student Nutrition Program that is accessible to every child and youth. Programs should not be limited to students who meet indicators of poverty, as these have been shown to be unsuccessful due to the stigma involved as well as other factors. Support must also be provided to First Nations communities to enable children and youth in these communities to access healthy and culturally appropriate food.
- In order to complement Student Nutrition Programs we also ask that the Government continue to implement policies that ensure the procurement of local, fresh and sustainable foods into schools, addressing the nutritional needs of children and youth with the additional benefit of supporting Ontario's economy. The Local Food Fund (\$30 M over 3 years) can help address these multiple objectives as well as the food distribution and logistics co-ordinators that will be hired across the province.

Support Food Literacy, Especially in the School Setting

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Childhood obesity negatively affects children, their families, and ultimately the province; costing about \$4.5 billion per year – \$1.6 billion directly and \$2.6 billion indirectly according to the recently released Healthy Kids Strategy. What is needed is a broad approach to help build a more sustainable, healthy and equitable food system.

We would like to express our support for the Government of Ontario to advance related food literacy and food security programs that can support all children and youth to access healthy food and learn to make healthy food choices throughout their lives. Teaching children the valuable skills of growing and preparing healthy foods can go a long way to combating obesity while also giving them life-long skills, making for healthier generations to come and savings on healthcare.

- We would like to see the Government of Ontario fund and support other education and health-based programs, such as school gardens and food skills and culinary programs, as well as to promote other curriculum opportunities and provide related teacher training. These could be linked to the Student Nutrition Program and cafeteria service delivery so that children and youth understand where food comes from, the impacts of food on health as well as the environment and the economy, and how to grow, prepare, and prefer healthy, safe and nutritious food. These would help give children and youth the knowledge and skills needed to support lifelong healthy eating habits and to access healthier food. Such an approach would collectively help address the problems of child and youth hunger, obesity and food insecurity.

In closing, members of Sustain Ontario and the Ontario Edible Education Network congratulate the Government on its recent support for Student Nutrition Programs and for other recent initiatives. We would recommend that future actions include the establishment and implementation of a broader Food and Nutrition Strategy that address hunger and food insecurity across ministerial purviews. We would be pleased to speak further with you on this issue. We look forward to being involved in this and other government initiatives to bring positive changes to Ontario's food system and ensure the health of Ontario's individuals and families.

Sincerely,



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Sustain Ontario is a cross-sectoral alliance that is working to create a food system that is healthy, ecological, equitable and financially viable. Sustain Ontario works collaboratively to connect members,

showcase food system innovations and champions, explore and research pressing issues in the food system, and advocate for a healthy and sustainable food system. With 430 members in the Ontario food and farming sector, Sustain Ontario's reach is province-wide.

Sustain Ontario is a project of Tides Canada Initiatives Society (TCI). TCI is a shared administrative platform that provides professional organizational support (e.g. governance, financial management, HR, and regulatory compliance) to 40 social justice and environmental projects.

The **Ontario Edible Education Network** has been established to bring together groups in Ontario that are doing great work to connect children and youth with good food. The network better enables these groups to share resources, ideas, and experience, work together on advocacy, and facilitate efforts across the province to get children and youth eating, growing, cooking, celebrating, and learning about healthy, local and sustainably produced food.

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