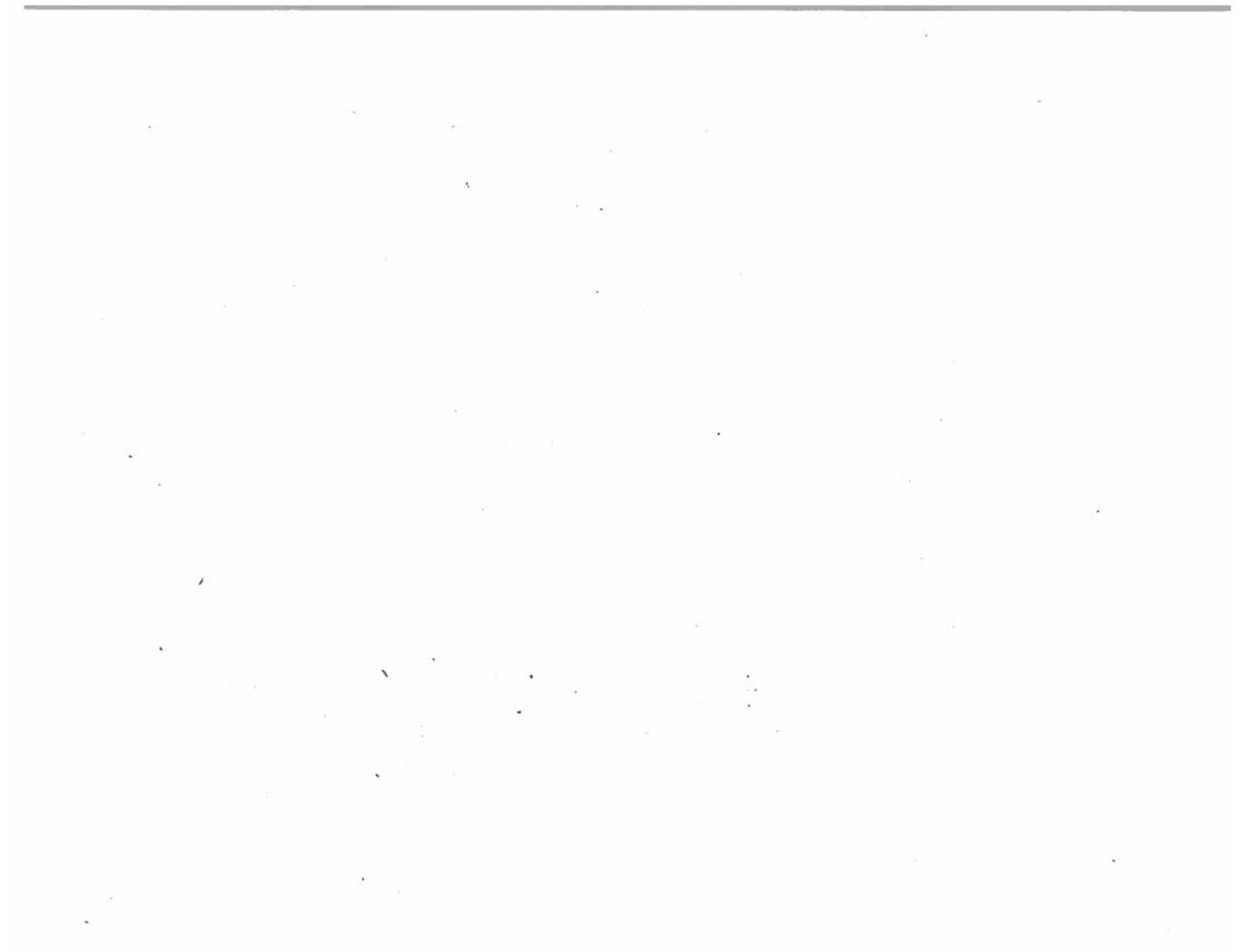


The Growing Season

Phase 2 Report
February 2001



Food and Hunger Action Committee



Food and Hunger
Action Committee
Phase II Report
January 2001

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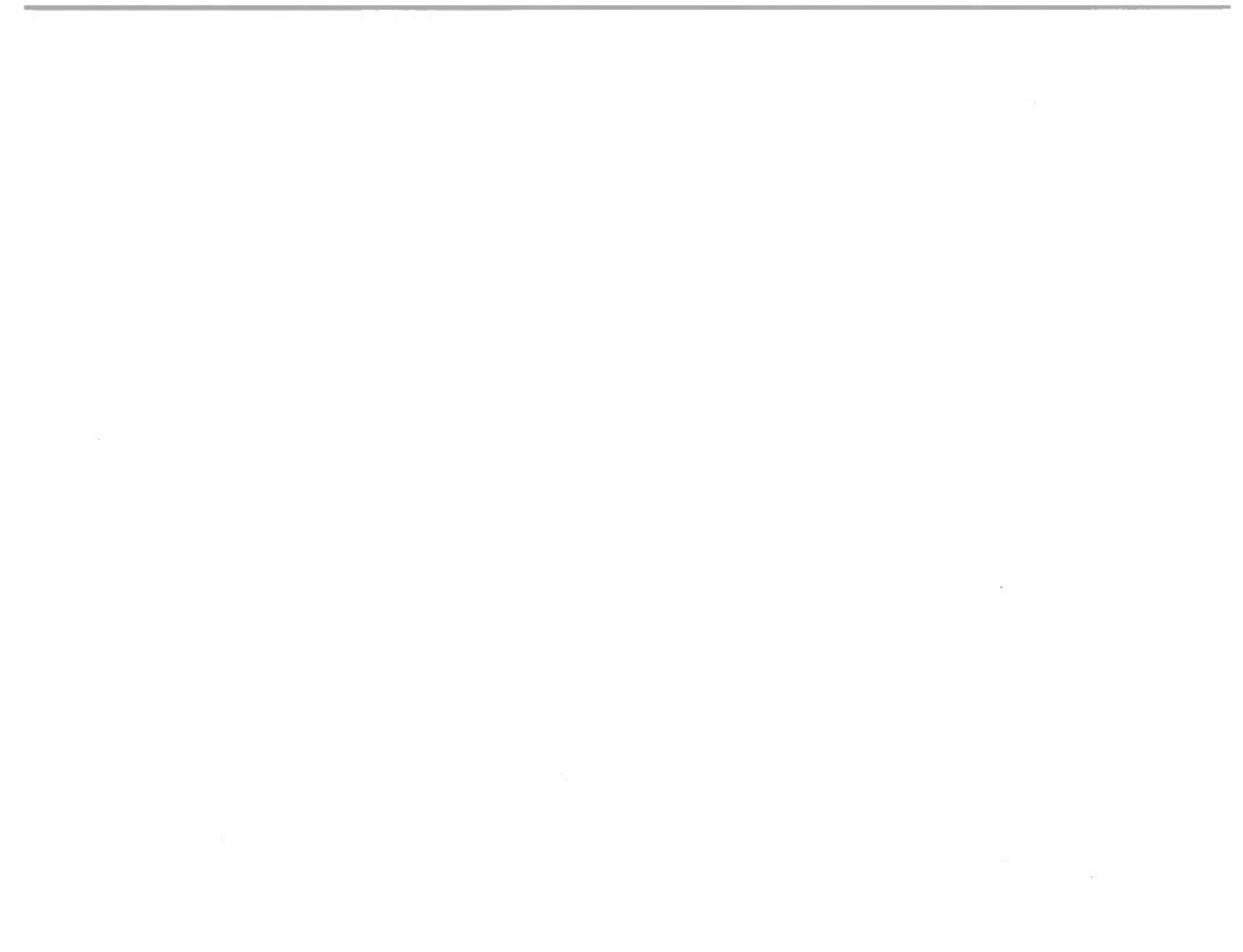


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A Food and Hunger Action Plan for Toronto

This report is the second part of a program of consultation and research on food and hunger in the City of Toronto. The Food and Hunger Action Committee was formed by Toronto City Council in December 1999, following a recommendation put forward by Hunger Watch (a coalition of emergency food organizations) and endorsed by the City's Millennium Task Force. Throughout 2000, City Councillors and staff worked in partnership with community groups to pool knowledge about existing programs and identify opportunities to use existing resources more effectively. The information gathered in this initial phase of the committee's work was published as the report "Planting the Seeds" in May 2000.

Toronto City Council unanimously endorsed the Phase I report in July 2000 and adopted its three recommendations. The recommendations called on the City to:

- 1) Endorse the principle that all people in Toronto should have an adequate supply of safe, nutritious, affordable, appropriate food;
- 2) Recognize that the City, as a health promoter, has a role in advocating, coordinating and supporting systems, policies and programs to ensure food security in Toronto; and
- 3) Approve the following actions for Phase II of the Food and Hunger Action Committee's work:
 - a) Develop a Food Charter for the City of Toronto;
 - b) Develop a Food and Hunger Action Plan for the City of Toronto that proposes concrete strategies to improve food security and access to safe, affordable and nutritious food for all



Torontonians, identifies policy and program changes required to improve the coordination and delivery of services related to food and hunger, and recommends appropriate roles for each level of government;

- c) Report back to the new City Council with the Food Charter and the Food and Hunger Action Plan by February 2001;
- d) Identify priority initiatives for the 2001 budget process within the context of the Food and Hunger Action Plan.

During the late summer and fall, the committee worked to develop an action plan with recommendations for all levels of government to reduce hunger, improve public health, support community-based food security organizations, and make Toronto more of a "food-secure" city. This report contains those recommendations, together with background information that supports them. The Food Charter for the City of Toronto has been published in a separate document.

Learning from the community

The Action Plan comes from what the committee learned from consultation with community groups, research by staff, and deputations from experts and concerned individuals.

The first point the committee learned may seem obvious, but cannot be overstated: **people suffer hunger because they cannot afford food.** People on low incomes are worse off than they were in 1995, a year of dramatic cuts to social assistance rates. Social assistance rates have not increased since then, and a number of benefits have been cut. At the same time, inflation has eroded the buying power of the dollar, and housing costs have risen considerably. There is more hunger than ever before in the city, because the poor are getting poorer.

Second, the Committee learned that **the volunteer and charitable sector cannot handle increasing demands for food assistance resulting from cutbacks to federal and provincial social programs.** While the hungry become needier and more desperate, the volunteers are burning out from years of overwork. Charities are also suffering from a lack of resources and are stretched to the limit. Community groups have a role to play, and volunteers will continue to donate their time, but they need support. The City can play an important role in coordinating the efforts of different groups, providing space, equipment and staff support, and ensuring that volunteers spend their time on meaningful work, rather than on efforts to keep organizations afloat.

Third, the committee learned that **food programs provided by city and community groups are**



effective and merit continued support. Child nutrition programs help schoolchildren get more out of the time they spend in class. Prenatal programs improve the health of newborns, and help prevent health problems in later life. Meal programs for seniors help frail or isolated people get healthy meals and human contact on a regular basis. Our efforts build on a solid foundation.

Fourth, the committee learned that **existing programs are unevenly distributed throughout the city.** Suburban neighbourhoods have the same problems as downtown neighbourhoods, but fewer resources to tackle those problems.

Fifth, the committee learned that **community food programs can be an excellent form of local economic and community development.**

The Daily Bread Food Bank was established in 1984 in an effort to coordinate food pantries that began springing up in Toronto in the early 1980s.



Community gardens don't just grow food — they contribute to the gardeners' health and to the vitality of Toronto's neighbourhoods. Food is the basis of many successful businesses that hire workers and contribute to the local economy.

A final lesson, briefly introduced in the Phase I report, and given renewed importance by later events: **Toronto must find ways to reduce the garbage it produces and better ways to deal with the garbage it does produce.** During the consultation and research for this Phase II report, the committee learned about many opportunities to reduce Toronto's waste in ways that enhance both food security and the capacity of community-based organizations.

With these considerations in mind, the committee, its staff and community partners developed an Action Plan for Food and Hunger in Toronto.

The Action Plan is organized according to appropriate roles that the City can play. In adopting the Phase I report, City Council accepted the roles of: **"advocating, coordinating and supporting systems, policies and programs to ensure food security in Toronto."**¹ The first three sections outline the actions the City can take in these three areas.

The final section adds another dimension to the City's role in food security: **innovating** in order to benefit from the cost savings, job creation and economic spin-offs possible in a city committed to food security.

¹City of Toronto, *Planting the Seeds: The Food and Hunger Action Committee Phase I Report*, May 2000, page 37.

A practical approach to food security

The Food and Hunger Action Committee decided to address hunger and chronic undernourishment in our city in the context of a larger problem that many Torontonians face: food insecurity.² By taking this approach, the committee has been able to build on the fact that food touches nearly every aspect of the City's activities, from emergency shelter services to public health to community building to waste management. Also, the food security approach generates solutions that benefit everyone in a wide range of ways, from economic development to a cleaner environment.

This report does, however, not pretend to solve every problem associated with hunger or food security. This is not a master plan with a budget to match. It is a set of practical, feasible first steps that build on existing programs and nurture emerging partnerships and opportunities. The recommendations have been carefully drafted to be implemented now and to be effective right away.

One theme behind the recommendations in this report is that **prevention** makes better sense

than disaster relief. Although nobody questions the wisdom that a milligram of prevention is worth a kilogram of cure, the urgency of crises sometimes overwhelms our commitment to support people who are at risk, but not yet desperate. The commitment to prevention means finding resources for a full spectrum of productive responses.

A second theme underlying the recommendations is the importance of **linkages**. This means collaboration among departments and partnerships that bring together city, community, environmental and business organizations. As the Phase I report showed, the way we produce, distribute, consume and dispose of food affects the economy, the environment, human health, and the city's social fabric. These are interconnected. Changes in one area affect the others. Looking at the big picture allows us to see that money spent in one area can come from savings or revenues elsewhere.

²Throughout this document, we use the term "food security." Canada's *National Action Plan for Food Security* states that "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." This is a useful beginning. In Phase I, Toronto City Council adopted the following expanded definition of food security:

1. The availability of a variety of foods at a reasonable cost.
2. Ready access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternative food sources.
3. Sufficient personal income to buy adequate foods for each household member each day.
4. The freedom to choose personally- and culturally-acceptable foods.
5. Legitimate confidence in the quality of the foods available.
6. Easy access to understandable, accurate information about food and nutrition.
7. The assurance of a viable and sustainable food production system.

A third theme is the need to use **underused resources** creatively and effectively. Many of the resources and talents in the city lie waiting to be tapped. Before inventing from scratch, the City should look at these resources and talents.

Focusing on prevention, connections, and the wise use of existing resources offers the opportunity to create new streams of both **savings and revenues**, a fourth theme in this report. For example, money spent supporting small food-related businesses that hire and train young people or marginalized workers can save money on social assistance costs. Dollars

spent on making it easier for people to get healthy food are dollars saved on medical costs for diseases caused by poor nutrition.

Finally, over the course of the year, community groups and interested individuals gave thousands of hours of volunteer time to attend meetings and workshops, comment on proposals and provide information. They all share the conviction that **access to healthy, safe, affordable, and appropriate food is a basic human right**, like the right to health care, education, and access to roads or recreational opportunities. We live in a land of plenty. There is no good reason for anyone in Toronto to go hungry.

Toronto in the lead

Toronto has long been at the forefront of public health initiatives and food security research. In 1991, in the absence of federal and provincial leadership on food security, the former City of Toronto created the Toronto Food Policy Council. In 1992, Toronto issued a "Declaration on Food and Nutrition" that stated its intention to ensure the long-term sustainability and security of the city's food supply. Toronto was also one of the first world cities to sign on to the United Nations' Healthy Cities movement.

The creation of the Food and Hunger Action Committee and Council's adoption of the Phase I report are evidence of the City's ongoing commit-

ment to food security. The energy and diversity of the city's community groups testify to the creativity and openness that flourish in a city in which people feel that their voices are heard. The City's long-term investment in healthy public policy expertise continues to pay off, as the range of innovative proposals tabled by the Toronto Food Policy Council and others indicates.

Leadership should not, however, turn to complacency. There is still much to be done. Toronto can remain in the lead only by maintaining its support for existing programs and seeking out opportunities for new initiatives that will lead to greater food security for more Torontonians.

Part One: The City as Advocate for Food Security

The City of Toronto is close to the people it serves, because it lives with their problems, needs and values. When residents see a problem that needs to be addressed, they often come to the City for help first. They come in the hope that City Council will have a better idea of where to turn for help amidst the maze of jurisdictions than they do.

Respected community agencies have repeatedly come to the City for help in dealing with the chronic

hunger faced by the people they are trying to help. These agency leaders turned to the City because they need a champion to take their case to federal and provincial politicians who have turned a deaf ear to their pleas in the past. They believed that City Council was prepared to listen, to learn, to lend its expertise and voice to their cause. This is where the City's role in dealing with hunger properly begins. It is not about passing the buck. It is about leadership.

Food security, housing and income

In Toronto, hunger is caused by poverty, not by food shortages. Low incomes and high rents make it hard for many people to make ends meet, and force them into trade-offs. "Pay the rent or feed the kids" is the painful choice many low-income parents face.

Income security cannot be addressed at the municipal level alone. The City does not control employment insurance policies or social assistance levels, which directly affect the incomes of the poorest people in the city. These are the responsibility of the federal and provincial governments, respectively.

The policies of the provincial government are particularly important. In 1989,³ Ontario had the lowest rate of child poverty among the Canadian provinces: one in ten children lived in poverty. By 1997, this rate had more than doubled: one in five children in Ontario lived in poverty.⁴ Ontario also

has the country's lowest rate of unemployed persons receiving employment insurance. Only 25% of unemployed workers received benefits in 1997.

Despite the rising cost of living, Ontario's social assistance benefits have not increased from the rate set in 1995, when benefits were cut by 21.6%. At present, a single parent with one child receives \$13,704 a year from social assistance. That's about \$9,000 below the poverty line, as defined by Statistics Canada.⁵ The gap is even larger for couples with more than one child and for single people.

Three other factors have led to deepening poverty among Toronto's worst-off residents. First, inflation has decreased the buying power of the Canadian dollar, so that social assistance recipients are now getting fewer real dollars than they were in 1995. Second, the City of Toronto, which was forced

37% of food bank users are children, 11% are seniors and 40% of the heads of households are disabled.

³1989 was the year in which the federal House of Commons passed a resolution "to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000."

⁴The Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario – Campaign 2000.

⁵The poverty line is defined as \$22,726 for such a family. This measure, known as the Low-Income Cut-Off and expressed as a yearly income level, was developed by Statistics Canada. A family with an income below the Low-Income Cut-Off level is defined as poor.

There are 106 Food Bank outlets and 36 Food Pantries in the City of Toronto.

to absorb federal cutbacks and provincial downloading, has had to reduce supplementary benefits to social assistance recipients, such as dental benefits or bedding allowances.⁶ Third, Toronto suffers from a severe shortage of affordable housing. Fewer than 100 units of affordable rental housing have been built in the city in the past three years. The social housing waiting list for affordable housing is tens of thousands of names long. People can wait as long as seven to 10 years for single units and 15 years for family units. Toronto's vacancy rate for rental housing is now only 0.6%. Rents are rising at twice the rate of inflation — an average of 12% over the last two years, and the *Tenant Protection Act* makes it easier and more profitable for landlords to evict tenants who fail to pay the rent on time.

Poverty and housing insecurity have serious consequences for public health and community well-being. Statistics Canada had found significant differences in the health rate for low-income people relative to high-income people.⁷ Poverty and hunger

marginalize their victims, leading to social exclusion and the weakening of the social fabric.

Because low-income people are having a hard time trying to pay the rent and buy food, food banks have become a permanent part of the city's food distribution system.⁸ The Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank, which publish annual statistics, found that 65% of the people who use food banks pay more than half of their income on rent. They also found that in 2000, the average food bank user has only \$4.95 a day left after paying rent: this money is all that is available for food, clothes, transportation, toiletries and household needs.

Poverty has also led to the expansion of the Out of the Cold programs, and to an increased need for drop-ins and emergency shelters. Although the Out of the Cold program was originally intended to provide shelter first and food second, many hungry people come just for a meal and not for shelter.⁹

⁶There is one important and heartening exception to this trend. When the province cut benefits to pregnant women to pay for extra food, the city chose to retain and even increase the benefit, because it understood the value of good nutrition for pregnant women.

⁷Dennis Raphael, "Public Health Responses to Health Inequalities," *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, November – December 1998. The Canadian Public Health Association, at its annual meeting in 2000, issued a statement calling for the elimination of the barriers to health experienced by people living in poverty.

⁸There are at present 106 food bank outlets in Toronto and 36 food pantries.

⁹The City conducted a survey in 2000 to find out how and why people use drop-ins. The results showed that many people go to drop-ins to get a meal or a snack. Some of the people who came to eat were homeless; others were living in rooming houses where cooking facilities were limited; still others simply could not afford to buy their own food.

Introduce shelter allowances geared to Toronto rents

Provincial social assistance payments are made up of a basic needs component, which is intended to cover food, clothing, transportation and other necessities, and a shelter component, which is to be used for rent. In Ontario, the shelter component of social assistance is:

- ☛ \$325 for a single person
- ☛ \$511 for a single parent with one child
- ☛ \$602 for two parents with two children.

In Toronto, the average rent for a *bachelor* apartment is almost \$600. Clearly, these shelter allowance levels are inadequate, forcing many people to use their food allowance for rent. Social assistance recipients in Toronto are at a considerable disadvantage relative to those in other Ontario cities because of Toronto's high rental costs. This inequity can be addressed only by making it possible for social assistance recipients to pay market rents. Therefore, the Food and Hunger Action Committee

requests that Toronto City Council reaffirm its support for the recommendation of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, to ask the Province of Ontario to increase the shelter component of social assistance.

The Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force also recommended shelter allowances to reduce the percentage of income spent by the working poor on rent. People who earn the minimum wage are at a disadvantage in Toronto's housing market, where rents are continuing to rise. As a result, many food bank users come from working poor families. At present, many working families spend 50% or more of their income on shelter. If this percentage were reduced to between 35 and 40%, the family could afford more of its own food.

The Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force also recommended that the Province increase funding for rent supplement programs for low-income

The food banks have found that 65% of their clients are paying more than 65% of their financial assistance for rent. This leaves approximately \$4.95 per day for all other expenses, including food.

households in new affordable rental housing. The Task Force also recommended shelter allowances targeted to working poor families as a first priority and to working adults, when feasible. The aim of this program, which would require annual re-application, is to reduce the risk of homelessness and to ensure that the transition from welfare to employment does not increase the risk of homelessness in their 1995 election platform; the Food and Hunger Action Committee recommends that Council request the fulfilment of that election commitment.

Recommendation 1: The City of Toronto should renew its request to the Province of Ontario to increase the shelter component maximum of social assistance to reflect local market rents, increase funding for rent supplements and create a new shelter allowance program targeted to the working poor, as recommended by the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Allow all low-income families to keep their Child Benefit Supplements

The Canada Child Tax Benefit and National Child Benefit Supplement, a modest income top-up for low-income families, are intended to reduce the rate and intensity of child poverty. But any positive effect for families on social assistance is nullified by the Province of Ontario, which treats the federal benefit as income and deducts the amount from social assistance cheques.

In 1998, Toronto asked the provincial minister of Community and Social Services to rescind the claw-back, which undoes any good the federal program offers families on social assistance. Because income supplements could make a difference in the amount

of money available for healthy meals for the children of parents on social assistance, the Food and Hunger Action Committee considers the province's policy a food security issue.

Recommendation 2: The City of Toronto should once again ask the Province of Ontario to rescind its decision on the National Child Benefit Supplement and allow families receiving social assistance benefits to keep all income received from the supplement as a way to improve the incomes of low-income families.

Continue to advocate for more affordable housing

The shortage of affordable housing in Toronto contributes to poverty and food insecurity. One in four tenant households in Toronto pays more than 50% of their income on housing, leaving little money for food and other necessities.

The affordable housing crisis in Toronto is well documented in the City of Toronto's *Report Card on Homelessness 2001*. The report card makes a number of recommendations related to housing. This includes recommendations that the City urge the federal government to make good on its election promise for an assisted rental housing program. And further, that the appropriate amount of funding be provided to build housing on the scale outlined in the program (65,000 new units nation-wide over the next four years). This federal leadership is critical if Canada is to solve its affordable housing crisis. Canada is the only developed country in the world without a national housing program.

The report card also calls on the provincial government to do what it can to support the federal housing program and to provide more funding for supportive and transitional housing.

The Food and Hunger Action Committee strongly supports the recommendations of the Toronto *Report Card on Homelessness 2001* and encourages City Council to add its endorsement to this much-needed action. Affordable rental housing is key to ensuring that low-income people have enough monthly income to pay the rent and feed themselves and their families.

Recommendation 3: The City of Toronto should urge the federal and provincial governments to act on the recommendations contained in the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001.

How the Province of Ontario can promote food security

Needed: a provincial food and nutrition strategy.

Epidemiological evidence regarding the impact of diet on chronic disease prevention is convincing and provides the rationale for a significant investment of provincial resources. Nutrition programs also require adequate funding so that they will be of sufficient duration and intensity to demonstrate effectiveness.

The province's tobacco strategy, *Actions Will Speak Louder Than Words: Getting Serious about Tobacco Control in Ontario* (February 1999), recommends a number of actions including price disincentives,

comprehensive public education, changes to regulations governing packaging, labelling, retail controls, environmental support (that is, smoke-free spaces), research, monitoring and evaluation. Similar measures could be adapted to food, nutrition and food security.

In the absence of provincial leadership, public health departments are left with meagre legal and financial resources. Less than 1% of provincial health monies go to nutrition and food security programs, for instance, even though many experts view such programs as a first line of defence against runaway health costs, especially among aging populations.

As with the tobacco strategy, a provincial nutrition and food security strategy needs to take public education, proper labelling and retail practices into account. A sound strategy would also fund such initiatives as the Ontario Public Health Association's food security coordinator, who helps public health staff share information, and an Association website linking food security agencies across the province.

Recommendation 4: The City of Toronto should continue to advocate to the Province of Ontario to establish a comprehensive provincial food and nutrition strategy, and provide funding to the Ontario Public Health Association to support a full-time provincial food security coordinator.

Increase the provincial contribution to Child Nutrition Programs

Child Nutrition Programs in Toronto, which provide healthy meals and snacks to schoolchildren, are currently funded in a shared partnership model: 24% municipal funding, 24% provincial funding and 52% funding from parents, community groups and local businesses. With the increased demand for the programs, the City of Toronto has increased funding to child nutrition programs to fulfil its commitment to the partnership funding model. There was, however, no concurrent increase in funding from the

province, despite increasing demand for the programs. At present, provincial funding lags behind the City's, and has not risen to meet the schools' needs for new meal and snack programs.

Recommendation 5: The City of Toronto should ask the Province of Ontario to match the City's contribution to Child Nutrition Programs in Toronto.

Ensure that schools provide students with facilities and time to eat a nutritious lunch

Students spend many hours each day at school, and need to meet a considerable proportion of their food requirements during that time. Most students no longer have the option of going home to eat lunch, as was the norm in the past. Some schools have not kept pace with these changes.

Some parents have expressed concern that their children do not have adequate eating facilities at their schools, such as kitchens and lunch rooms, and that children are not given enough time to eat a healthy lunch. At present, the funding formula that determines space allocation in schools does not adequately take into account the need for kitchens and eating areas in schools. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training should ensure

that policies and guidelines are in place so that schools have adequate kitchens and lunch rooms and that students have enough time to eat a healthy meal during the school day.

Recommendation 6: The City of Toronto should urge the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, in cooperation with the Toronto District School Board, to ensure that all newly-constructed schools and all renovations to schools include adequate kitchen facilities and lunch rooms for students, and to ensure that all students have adequate time in their school schedule to eat a healthy lunch.

Get provincial support for urban agriculture

Although many cities in the world produce more than 20% of their fresh produce requirements from within city boundaries, urban agriculture is significantly underdeveloped in Ontario. At least 60% of the fresh produce consumed in Toronto is imported from the United States, and one-third of the imported food arrives during Ontario's own growing season. There are many entrepreneurs who would be ready to develop urban production and processing operations if they could have access to the same support programs as other growers. If the right supports were in place, there are many food businesses that would buy local products, because they want the freshest products available.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs sponsors a Healthy Futures Funding program designed to support innovative projects that develop new market opportunities for Ontario food products. This funding should be made available for urban agriculture projects.

Recommendation 7: The City of Toronto should urge the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to include urban agriculture in the Healthy Futures Funding Program.

Roughly \$172 million is spent annually in the GTA to import fresh vegetables.

How the government of Canada can promote food security

Monitor nutrition and food security at the national level.

As all good managers know, you can't manage what you can't measure. That's probably why the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand all conduct regular surveys on the food consumption patterns of their citizens.¹⁰ The Canadian government has not collected that kind of systematic information for almost three decades, before the emergence of food banks. As a result, public health professionals lack the solid population-level information they need to develop sound policies.¹¹ Canada has no recent information about children's nutritional status, for instance.

*Canada's National Nutrition Plan*¹² stated that improving the nutritional health of Canadians

depends upon the country's ability to monitor nutritional health and respond appropriately. Food and nutrition policies and programs that enhance the health of the population require a strong information base and the ability to measure outcomes accurately. It is essential that the government know the nature and extent of hunger in the country.

Recommendation 8: The City of Toronto should urge Health Canada to initiate a national food and nutrition monitoring system; to support this system Statistics Canada should include questions that monitor food insecurity in a national population-level survey to determine the extent and nature of hunger in Canada.

¹⁰In the United States and the United Kingdom, these surveys are ongoing, and in New Zealand and Australia there is a commitment to repeating the national surveys.

¹¹At present, the only available national statistics measure income and poverty levels. Local food banks also collect statistics on their users. But neither of these sets of statistics measures food security or insecurity accurately. For example, it is possible to be poor and food-secure (if you live on a farm), or well-off and food-insecure (if you are elderly, disabled or suffering from chronic illness). Food bank statistics also fail to capture the level of food insecurity, since many people who need food do not go to food banks for a variety of reasons, including the stigma associated with food bank use.

¹²Joint Steering Committee Responsible for the Development of a National Nutrition Plan for Canada, *Nutrition for Health: An Agenda for Action*. 1996.

Ensure that Health Canada's prenatal programs provide healthy food

Health Canada funds a number of community-based prenatal programs in Toronto under the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Programs. The goal of these programs is to reduce the rate of low birth-weight babies born to at-risk women.

Although most programs give women a gift certificate from a local grocery store, some make do with food provided from a food bank. This food is generally of poor nutritional quality, the supply is inconsistent, and the variety is limited. Some women feel uncomfortable taking this food, and others have difficulty transporting the food to their homes. This practice also reduces the food available for regular food bank users. The Food and Hunger Action Committee considers it inappropriate that programs funded by Health Canada should rely on contributions from charity.

Recommendation 9: The City of Toronto should urge Health Canada to increase funding for nutritious foods for the participants of the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program, in order that programs do not have to rely on food banks.



Part Two: The City as Coordinator of Community-Based Food Security Initiatives

Toronto is in a good position to help the city's many volunteer-based community groups to maximize their effectiveness. Many City Councillors and staff are experienced in forging constructive partnerships with community groups and agencies. With a relatively modest investment of time, these existing assets can lead to significant increases in the productivity and effectiveness of public-sector, private-sector and third-sector activities.

Make information more widely available

Raise awareness of food costs.

Boards of Health across the province are required by the Ontario Ministry of Health to estimate the cost of a basket of nutritious food. The annual estimate is based on surveying the cost of 66 foods in up to 12 different food stores and reflects

nutrition recommendations set by *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* (1992) and *Nutrition Recommendations* (1990). The Nutritious Food Basket information on costs can be used to identify financial barriers to food security, because the costs of healthy eating can be readily measured against money left over after shelter, transportation, clothing and child care have been paid for.

Each year, this report is presented to the Board of Health, but the matter often ends there. The City of Toronto could make better use of this information to raise public awareness and advise provincial and federal governments of needed policy changes.

The average person spends \$2,080 on groceries per year, making Toronto's annual food bill over \$5 billion.

Recommendation 10: The City of Toronto should request that the Chair of the Board of Health bring a summary of the annual estimate of the cost of a nutritious food basket in Toronto before City Council, so that City Council can use the estimates to make its case for provincial and federal measures to address food security in the city.



Share food information on Toronto's website

The Internet offers a cost-effective way to increase awareness of nutrition and food security. A recent survey found that 55% of Canadians with web access visit health-related sites, often looking for information on diseases and nutrition.¹³ This may explain why two food-related postings (Discover Healthy Eating!, a resource for teachers, and Eat Smart! Ontario's Healthy Restaurant Program) are among the 12 most-visited sections in Toronto Public Health's material on the City's website.

The Toronto Public Health web presence could be expanded to include food security information that volunteer and community groups can use to increase their effectiveness. The site could provide samples of low-cost, easy-to-prepare recipes and menu ideas that can be used in both school and parks, and recreation snack and meal programs.

A bulletin board with information on upcoming events related to food security could bring new people into the loop. Public Health web pages could also feature links to community groups that offer food security services, so that potential clients, donors and volunteers can connect with groups most relevant to their needs and interests. Information on food also offers an opportunity to introduce and link Toronto's many ethno-cultural traditions and food-based community organizations.

Recommendation 11: The City of Toronto should support Toronto Public Health, in collaboration with its community partners, in its efforts to enhance nutrition and food security information and links on the City's website.

Make sure that people with disabilities have the information they need

During the community consultation process, the Food and Hunger Action Committee learned that many people on low incomes aren't getting the disability benefits for which they qualify. The Ontario Disability Support Program, the Canada Pension Disability Plan and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Plan offer higher benefits than Ontario Works, and therefore help make food more affordable for people on fixed incomes.

However, people who addressed the Committee felt that the complex application process and problems of documenting certain forms of disability prevent people from knowing about or getting support they are entitled to.

Cities do not administer these programs and therefore cannot directly affect their policies or practices. However, when people with disabilities are denied access to program benefits they are entitled

¹³Ipsos-Reid survey, released November 22, 2000.

to, the burden of helping them overcome social exclusion or food insecurity often falls on the City. To keep responsibility where it belongs, Toronto can work with community agencies by preparing and distributing information on the programs, as well as easy-to-read guidelines on who qualifies and how to apply.

Make room for food security

Develop an inventory of existing City-owned kitchens.

Long-time friends are invited into the kitchen, not just the living room. The City's food security partners are long-time friends. The City owns dozens of buildings with excellent kitchen facilities. Many of them are unused in the evenings, on weekends, or for part of the year. Making them accessible to community-based food security groups at times when supervised community use does not interfere with their principal function would increase the capacity of groups to organize healthy cooking classes, community kitchens and workshops. This would add to the value of the City's assets and boost the capacity of community groups.

Several things need to happen before such a policy is adopted. The City needs an inventory of kitchen facilities that provides information on the

Recommendation 12: The City of Toronto should support Community and Neighbourhood Services and other agencies working with people with disabilities by helping to disseminate information on income assistance programs to ensure that disabled people receive benefits for which they qualify.

status of what would be safely and usefully available at certain times. The City also needs to consult with the managers of these facilities to identify limitations and restrictions needed to protect the City's assets. Finally, the City needs to establish policy guidelines on application procedures, supervision practices and other regulations for use.

Recommendation 13: The City of Toronto should request Corporate Services, Community and Neighbourhood Services, and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to prepare a report providing an inventory of kitchen facilities and spaces owned by the City and its agencies, and appropriate policy guidelines governing their use by community-based food security groups; this report should be presented to City Council in December 2001.

Develop technical guidelines for kitchens in new city-owned buildings

Many food security agencies and groups deliver programs at kitchen facilities in City-owned community centres. To make the best use of construction or renovation crews already working on kitchens, guidelines need to be in place on the technical, health and safety requirements of kitchens used for collective meal preparation. It is always more cost-effective to build or renovate right the first time.

Recommendation 14: The City of Toronto should request that Facilities and Real Estate and Parks and Recreation, in cooperation with Toronto Public Health, develop guidelines for the construction and renovation of City-owned buildings to ensure that kitchen facilities are adequate for community food security programs.

Promote increased food security in social housing

As of January 1, 2001, the City is financially and administratively responsible for all the social housing stock administered by the Toronto Housing Company and the former Metro Toronto Housing Authority: a total of 95,000 units. Some social housing already offers on-site community gardens, food buying clubs and community kitchens. However, many more residents of social housing could benefit from similar community food initiatives.

The Food and Hunger Action Committee would like to see more social housing providers consider such initiatives, which could offer many benefits to individuals and families in social housing and to the housing programs as a whole. Before undertaking such initiatives, the City needs to know what

other jurisdictions are doing, so that it can learn from them.¹⁴ This would require a study of the opportunities and options available in existing social housing.

Recommendation 15: The City of Toronto should request the Toronto Food Policy Council, in consultation with the Toronto Housing Company and Metropolitan Toronto Housing Corporation (formerly MTHA), to form a working group with appropriate City staff and community partners, to report on the opportunities to expand community food initiatives in the City's social housing portfolio, by September 2002.

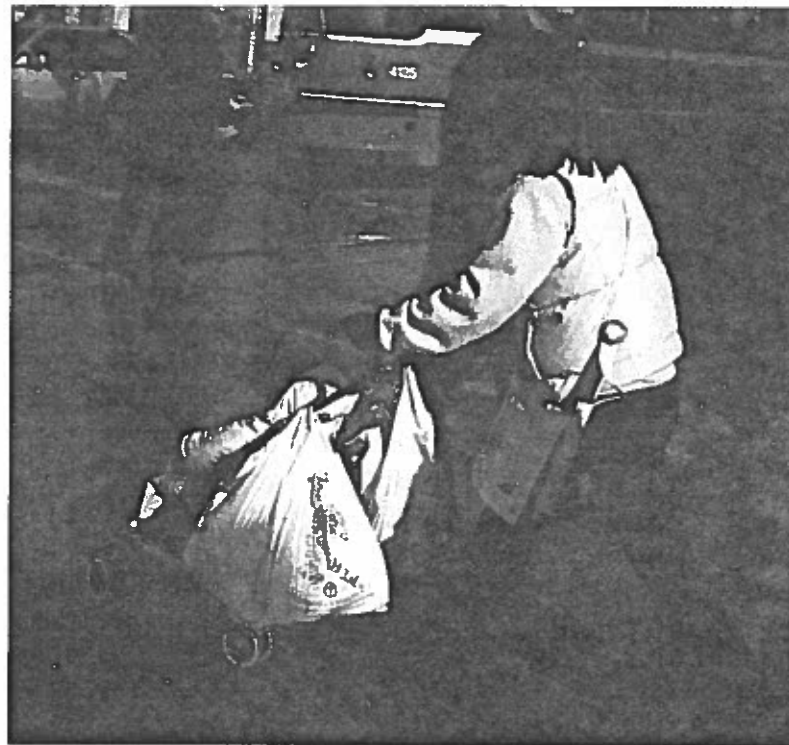
¹⁴For example, social housing in Scandinavia, especially specialty housing for seniors, includes well-appointed kitchen and cafeteria areas, designed for quality food programming in the buildings. There, housing planners try to animate social housing buildings by providing common meeting spaces for the residents. They have found that the common kitchen/eating area should be attractive, visible, easy to understand and use. Social housing developers are trying to create a positive image for seniors' social housing and money has been spent to break down social isolation.

There are 6,172 food service establishments in Toronto, employing 61,217 people. An additional 31,444 work in grocery stores, supermarkets and convenience stores (1996 figures).

Develop a strategy for city neighbourhoods underserved by food stores

The World Health Organization report, "Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts," states clearly that "Access to good, affordable food makes more difference to what people eat than health education."¹⁷ No amount of telling people to eat more fruits and vegetables will change their diet if they cannot easily buy such things.

In a 1997 report titled "Food Retail Access and Food Security for Toronto's Low-Income Citizens," which looked at the structural factors influencing food retail location, the Toronto Food Policy Council identified several areas of the former Toronto that were poorly served by quality food stores and outlined the consequences to low-income residents. The Food and Hunger Action Committee, on its tours through several Toronto neighbourhoods, saw that certain areas of Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke have few stores where people can buy reasonably priced, good-quality food. Since that time, the food retail industry has continued its mammoth chain store consolidations and closures.



¹⁷World Health Organizations, Healthy Cities, "Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts," edited by Richard Wilkinson and Michael Marmot. This report was posted on the WHO's website at <http://www.who.dk/healthy-cities/sf.htm>.

The 1997 Food Policy Council report dealt only with food retail access in the former City of Toronto. Since the committee's preliminary investigation suggests that the problem is not restricted to the former City of Toronto, the City needs a strategic analysis of the siting of food stores throughout the amalgamated city, and of the City's options for addressing the problem of food retail access. In some cases, Toronto can learn how other jurisdictions have tackled this issue.¹⁸

Recommendation 17: The City of Toronto should request that Community and Neighbourhood Services and Urban Development Services, in consultation with the Toronto Food Policy Council, conduct a study to identify areas in the city in which food retail access is inadequate and to prepare a list of options the City can consider to remedy this problem, to be submitted to City Council by January 2002.

Make the most of farmers' markets

Toronto has about a dozen farmers' markets, including a year-round Saturday market in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood, and summer markets that operate on City properties in Etobicoke and Nathan Phillips Square. The markets offer locally-grown produce as well as flowers, baked goods, jams, honeys and condiments.

Farmers' markets are making a comeback in cities throughout North America. Many cities have found that markets attract tourists and residents,

and enliven formerly declining areas.¹⁹ Today, there are 113 farmers' markets in Ontario.

The University of Guelph has studied the economic impact of Ontario farmers' markets. The major beneficiaries are the farmers themselves, who gain a market for the food they grow and immediate feedback on the products they offer.²⁰ The study also found that for every dollar spent in a farmers' market, another two dollars moves through the economy, because people who come to the market

¹⁸For example, Dallas, Texas has a social fault line bisecting the city's north and south districts. With 45% of the population and 50% of the area, the South Dallas sector only has 10% of the commercial tax base. In December 1997, a random survey of South Dallas residents found that they had nowhere near the choice of food retail found in North Dallas. The City of Dallas Economic Development Department, using a basic business incentive package, has been able to assist in getting eight new supermarkets to locate in South Dallas since 1996. The strategy includes tax abatement on site infrastructure developments such as water lines, streetlights, curb cuts, and traffic signals.

¹⁹In the 1970s, the New York City Planning Department used a farmers' market to attract people to Union Square. This was the beginning of the New York City Green Markets program, which has evolved into 29 weekly open-air farmers' markets at 18 locations in the city, supporting 130 growers from four states. The NYC Council on the Environment, a public-private partnership housed in the Mayor's Office, operates the program. Green Markets have developed a roster of farmers. Before a new vendor can sell at a prestige location like Union Square, they must establish a track record of customer satisfaction at one of the newer or expanding Green Markets locations. To satisfy the increasing demand for farmers' markets, Green Markets have even developed a partnership with the New Farmer Development Program, which is launching a search for immigrants who want to try farming in their new country.

²⁰A study carried out in the United States found that 21 cents of every dollar spent on domestic food goes to farmers; the rest goes to processors, retailers, marketers, and so forth (A.V. Krebs, *The Agribusiness Examiner*, November 23, 1999). Although the same studies have not been done in Canada, the figures are likely to be similar.

also patronize other local businesses. Farmers' markets also benefit public health by bringing people together around healthy food.

Existing farmers' markets in Ontario tend to attract people who are not particularly sensitive to the prices of the food they buy. Many shoppers at the markets consider them mainly as an enjoyable alternative to buying food in a supermarket. This is in contrast to markets in Quebec and Europe, where people expect farmers' markets to offer fresh food at bargain prices. Quebec and European markets are frequented by people on limited budgets, who are there because they depend on the markets to offer fresh food cheaply.

Some cities have capitalized on the potential of farmers' markets to help feed low-income people while stimulating economic activity. One impressive example is Belo Horizonte, Brazil, which has pioneered food retail outreach to their low-income residents. The city set up stores and markets in the poorest areas of the city, and encourages local farmers to sell in bulk at deep discounts during off hours.

A similar type of farmers' market could work in Toronto, particularly in neighbourhoods that currently have few conventional food stores. Getting a private retailer to locate in a specific neighbourhood, even by offering incentives, is a difficult and time-consuming process. The City can, however, make public space available for a market wherever it chooses.



Recommendation 18: The City of Toronto should encourage Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to continue providing space for farmers' markets at civic centres to add vitality to these public spaces as well as to provide an opportunity for Torontonians to meet local farmers and buy the freshest food possible.

Recommendation 19: The City of Toronto should pilot a special community market for neighbourhoods underserved by conventional food stores to increase Toronto residents' opportunities to purchase fresh and affordable food.

Recognize the work of volunteers in supporting food security

Volunteers are the backbone of community-based agencies. Without volunteers, programs such as Meals on Wheels, Out of the Cold, community gardens, or school nutrition programs would not be able to continue. Volunteers get programs started and keep them going. However, the burden falls disproportionately on a relatively small number of people, and many of the most overburdened suffer burnout, especially when they feel that their work is not appreciated or that their efforts are not having much impact. Many volunteers are getting on in years, and in some places, younger replacements are hard to find.

A Statistics Canada report called *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* found that volunteer time declined by about 25% during the 1990s, from an average of 191 hours to 149 hours per person per year. Charitable donations are also down. A relatively small group of 5.9 million Canadian adults are responsible for more than 75% of all the giving and volunteering in the country. Within that group an even smaller group of only 1.27 million adults provides almost 50% of the volunteer time and donations. In Toronto, slightly more than 25% of the population volunteer their time, but 40% of those hours came from 5% of the volunteers, who gave 580 hours or more per year.



The City should recognize that it depends on those volunteers, just as much as the people they help directly. Every World Food Day, the Mayor should bring attention to these unsung heroes who give of themselves so that others have some measure of food security.

Recommendation 20: The Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services should establish a Community Food Initiatives Awards Program to honour the contributions of the volunteers who support the city's community-based food security sector.

Individual food bank donations make up 20% of food donated.

Part Three: The City as Supporter of Food Programs and Projects

The Phase I report of the Food and Hunger Action Committee, *Planting the Seeds*, included an inventory of all the programs in Toronto that had to do with food, grouped into four categories: food for survival (for example, emergency food and shelter programs); food for health (including child nutrition and prenatal programs); food for social well-being and community building (such as cooking programs

and community gardens); and food as part of the local economy and environment (including farmers' markets, urban agriculture and entrepreneurship).

The City of Toronto already supports a range of activities related to food. This action plan confirms the importance of the City's current efforts and builds on those initiatives.

Maintain and build on successful programs

Support Child Nutrition Programs

The importance of feeding children adequate amounts of healthy food cannot be overstated. The United States and many European countries have fed generations of children nutritious breakfasts and lunches to ensure that when they are in school, they can concentrate on their work, and also to help them avoid disease or learning problems caused by nutritional deficiencies. Canada is the only western industrial country that does not have a national child nutrition program.

The City of Toronto has already had the good sense and foresight to provide funding for child nutrition. Today, 65,000 children across the city participate in these Child Nutrition Programs. The City has agreed to cover 24% of the costs of such programs; another 24% is expected to come from the province, and the remainder comes from parents, local communities and businesses. Most of the programs are staffed by volunteers.

The programs are important to the children, and to their parents, some of whom lack the time or the money to ensure that their children eat a proper breakfast before school, or take an adequate packed lunch.

As the committee learned during its community consultations, the number of children who fail to eat a good breakfast or a nutritious lunch is only partly the result of poverty. It also reflects the rushed, over-stressed lives of many families. Children are often left to their own devices where food is concerned.

Teachers also appreciate the programs because they find that well-nourished children are readier to learn. However, due to limited funding, many programs cannot guarantee balanced, varied and filling meals or snacks. As well, many children do not go to schools that offer snack or meal programs.

The City has kept up funding to the Child Nutrition Programs, even at a time of cutbacks and restraint. The Food and Hunger Action Committee commends the City for its foresight and urges Toronto City Council to maintain its commitment to these essential programs.

Recommendation 21: The City of Toronto should continue to fund the Child Nutrition Program according to the shared funding partnership model.

Create a child nutrition pilot project during the summer months

Only 10 Child Nutrition Programs are offered during the summer months, all of them in community centres. These programs serve 620 children, only 1% of the children served during the school year. In order to reach a larger number of children, the Food and Hunger Action Committee proposes a summer pilot project to provide nutritious snacks to children in summer programs offered by the City.

This pilot project depends upon the development of a partnership between the Toronto District School Board, Parks and Recreation and Toronto Public Health to provide access to children enrolled in summer programs, as well as in-kind staffing and space. An innovative way to pilot this summer project would be to employ secondary school vocational students to work in the program. This would provide

students with a summer job that offers skills and employment experience.

Nutrition education would be incorporated into this pilot project. In addition, the partners could work together to develop healthy eating guidelines for special event days when meals or snacks are provided. The cost for this pilot project is \$27,000, which would go entirely to food and to pay the wages of the students working on the project.

Recommendation 22: The City of Toronto should provide \$27,000 for a summer pilot project that employs secondary school students to provide nutritious snacks to children enrolled in City-run summer programs..

Maintain support for meal programs for seniors

In 1994, Toronto Public Health conducted a study of seniors living alone in Toronto. This study found that 59% of the seniors surveyed were at nutritional risk and that 23% were at high nutritional risk. More specifically, the study showed that:

- ❖ 36% of respondents had an illness that made them change their usual diet
- ❖ 24% of respondents ate few fruits, vegetables or milk products
- ❖ 7% of respondents stated they didn't always have enough money to buy the food they needed
- ❖ 49% of respondents ate alone most of the time
- ❖ 15% of respondents were not always physically able to shop, cook or feed themselves.

Seniors have special nutritional needs, just like infants, growing children and pregnant women,

who are already supported by the City. The need for similar levels of support is currently being studied and will be addressed in a forthcoming Council report.

In the meantime, existing meal programs are an important opportunity for isolated seniors to get out of the house and meet other people. The Food and Hunger Action Committee feels that the City's existing support for congregate dining programs is an important lifeline for many seniors, and strongly urges the City to maintain its commitment to these programs.

Recommendation 23: The City of Toronto should maintain its support for congregate dining and meal programs that help meet the nutritional needs of seniors.

Encourage emergency programs to provide appropriate food

Homeless individuals, families, youth and women fleeing abusive partners may live temporarily in emergency shelters, some run by the City, others by community-based organizations. The shelters provide meals as part of their services. Shelter operators recognize the importance of nutritious food, especially for homeless people who may already be undernourished or in poor health.

Many different people with different food and nutrition needs turn to emergency shelters. It is a constant challenge for shelters to accommodate many different dietary needs within limited food budgets.

The Food and Hunger Action Committee heard from a number of individuals who were concerned

that the food provided in City-run programs should be appropriate. It is possible that through coordinated buying programs (see Recommendation 31), City-run programs could stretch their food budgets and ensure that the food they serve is appropriate to the needs of the people they serve.

Recommendation 24: The City of Toronto should request the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to work with emergency shelters and related programs to develop a policy encouraging meal options that are both nutritious and appropriate for people subject to dietary, cultural and ethical restrictions.

Approximately 1,200,000 emergency meals are served in Toronto each month.

Encourage healthy eating through cooking and life skills programs

Food and life skills are a foundation for healthy eating. Studies have found that most successful nutrition education initiatives feature active participation, in terms of food tasting, food preparation, analyzing one's diet and setting goals for improvement.²¹ Food skills programs encompass a range of activities, including food shopping, reading and interpreting labels, food preparation and storage, and social support. In the past, Toronto Public Health has developed a number of food skills and nutrition education programs to address some of the nutrition needs of Toronto's diverse communities (including Skills for Food Shopping, Cooking Healthy Together, the Basic Shelf Cook Book, and The Food Experience).

One of these programs, Cooking Healthy Together, is a community-based food skills program. Training is provided to staff and associates of community agencies serving at-risk groups in the expectation that the agencies will pass on what they learned when they offer programs. Using this model of "peer education" means the impact of the City's investment in training is multiplied many times.

In 2000, a partnership of 14 community agencies, each making in-kind contributions, successfully secured Trillium funding to pilot a program based on this effective model of peer education. Together with in-kind contributions from the agencies, the program involved more than 300 community participants

from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

This one-time funding ended in December 2000. However, an evaluation funded by Trillium indicated promising results from the program. The participants demonstrated behaviour changes such as healthier food choices, more economical shopping, and enhanced food preparation, storage and food purchasing skills.

The funding needed to continue this peer education program in partnership with community agencies is approximately \$106,500. This money would go directly to community agencies, and would be administered by a sponsoring agency using a collaborative partnership model. This would provide funding for 44 peer leaders to work in 21 community agencies throughout the City. It is estimated that approximately 54 Cooking Healthy Together series would be facilitated over this period and 526 community participants would be reached.

Recommendation 25: The City of Toronto should provide \$106,500 to ensure continuation of the peer education component of the partnership with community agencies involved with the Cooking Healthy Together program in 2001, and to enable staff and the community agencies involved to seek alternative long-term sources of funding for this program.

²¹Contento et al., "Nutrition Education and Implications." *Journal of Nutritional Education*, vol. 27, no. 6, 1995, page 280.

Since the program participants and peer leaders are likely to influence the food habits of other family members, it is estimated that the program can affect as many as 1,710 people altogether.

The Food and Hunger Action Committee would

like to see this program continued for another year on a pilot basis, so that both Public Health staff and community agencies are able to maintain this program while seeking alternative sources of funding for the long term.

Support increased food self-reliance in the community

Community food-based programs — including community gardens, cooperative food-buying clubs and community kitchens — are enormously important to the people who participate in them, yet they are underfunded, uncoordinated and overly dependent on volunteers.

The value of such community programs is more than simply a feel-good, nice-to-have addition to life in the city. Community building is essential to making Toronto a liveable, prosperous city in which people can do business. This essential community glue is widely recognized as an intangible asset in cities: economists call it “social capital” and social planners call it “community capacity.”

At present, the City of Toronto provides some funding for community food programs through City grants. However, the funds are insufficient to put many of these programs on a stable financial footing, or to provide programs everywhere they are needed. Moreover, current grants programs are not specifically designed to increase food security.

Many small yet important groups, including those that serve especially vulnerable people or

certain ethnocultural communities, cannot get the funding they need. Also, as the committee found out during its consultation, there are many suburban areas of the city that have downtown-type problems, but lack the downtown resources to deal with them. Funding is needed to equalize access to food programs across the city.

The City can play an important role in supporting new community food programs. Without the stability of at least a three-year program, many agency leaders have concluded that short-term grants can cause more wear and tear than they are worth, and end up exhausting and demoralizing staff and volunteers. The Food and Hunger Action Committee is therefore proposing a three-year pilot program, funded through the Community Service Grants Program, that will target funds specifically for new food security programs, with the goal of enabling people to become more self-reliant, so they will no longer have to depend on charity.

Provide food alternatives grants

The City already provides some funding to programs administered by well-established agencies to provide alternatives to food banks, such as the Good Food Box, bulk buying clubs and community gardens. There are, however, many more agencies that have the organization and resources in place to offer such programs, but lack the funding to do so.

Food alternatives grants could focus on innovative food programs that build individual and community capacity. That is, the programs should achieve more than one goal. They should involve skills training or build social connections at the same time as they increase people's access to nutritious, affordable food.

Offer project funding grants

Project funding grants, which would become available in 2002, would support specific projects for a limited time. The emphasis would be on building the capacity of smaller, less well-established groups to the point at which they become self-financing or are able to apply for ongoing grants from the City, other levels of government, corporations or philanthropic foundations.

Leaders from community groups told the committee repeatedly that there is a real need for this kind of support for smaller groups and agencies, which can often reach into communities that City staff know little about. These groups are often able to produce remarkable results with minimal funding, but they need some funding to get started. During the community consultations, the committee heard about a number of projects that would benefit underserved groups, but which needed some

By expanding the Community Service Grants Program, about 20 more agencies a year could be funded to deliver alternative food programs.

Recommendation 26: The City of Toronto should establish a three-year Food Alternatives Grants program as a pilot project under the Community Service Grants Program, to enable community groups and agencies to plan their activities; the pilot project would continue for three years with \$500,000 in funding for each year.

start-up money and coordination to get off the ground.

Because the food grants program represents a new approach to enhancing food security in the city, it is important to build in an evaluation process to ensure that the funding is actually achieving the goals set for it. Evaluation will help the food coordinators learn from each other's experiences and pool their findings. It will also help identify best practices across the city and ensure that the City is targeting its resources effectively.

Recommendation 27: The City of Toronto should pilot a two-year Community Food Initiatives project funding stream under the Community Service Grants Program; the funding would be \$250,000 a year in 2002 and 2003.

The first community garden in Toronto was established in 1973 in High Park. Today, there are 108 community gardens in Toronto, with approximately 3,000 plots and 4,500 participants.

Create more community gardens

In 1999, the City adopted a Community Garden Action Plan, which committed the City to ensuring that each ward would have at least one community garden by the end of 2001.²² To meet its own goal, the City will have to pick up the pace. Although there were 122 gardens in the city as of January 2001 (with 3,000 plots and 4,500 participants), 12 of the City's 44 reorganized wards still do not have community gardens.

The waiting lists for community gardens get longer every year. The success stories also lengthen every year. The Food and Hunger Action Committee heard repeatedly that community gardens bring people together in a unique way on a constructive project that benefits both the individuals who participate and the neighbourhood as a whole. From St. Jamestown to Agincourt, community gardeners have a chance to meet their neighbours, cooperate and share resources, get fresh air and exercise,²³ and improve the look and feel of their neighbourhoods. They also grow food they can eat. An average plot

produces about \$100 worth of fresh produce a year, which makes for a \$300,000 contribution to food self-reliance in the city.²⁴

Community gardens also help newcomers to the city settle into their neighbourhoods. Many people who come to Canada have experience in growing their own food and existing programs could benefit from their knowledge. At the same time, involving newcomers in community gardens helps them establish social support networks and a sense of connection to their community.

People can grow almost anything almost anywhere in the city, given some space and equipment. Nevertheless, one place in which gardens make sense is in City parks. Most parks have unused space that could be cultivated to grow food and flowers. At present, only 17 gardens in 10 wards use space in City parks.

Putting community gardens into the parks does not require a heavy investment from the City. The City already has a protocol for putting community

²²Based on an April 28, 1999 report of the Department of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to the Economic Development Committee in response to the work of the Environmental Task Force.

²³Gardening requires a range of activities (lifting, moving, digging, kneeling, bending) that offer a variety of health benefits. Dr. Lori Turner of the University of Arkansas, in a study of 3,000 women over the age of 50, found that gardening is second only to weight training in preventing osteoporosis among older women.

²⁴Estimate by Sean Cosgrove, Toronto Food Policy Council, based on information on the productivity of average Canadian backyard gardens provided by Ray Bollman, Agriculture Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa.



gardens in parks, but needs to identify suitable locations, fence the area, mark out the initial plots, install some garden benches and picnic tables, hook up a source of water, and provide some initial advice and support to the participants. Once people get accustomed to working on their own gardens, they do the rest, with little or no support from City staff.

As part of the Community Garden Action Plan, the City appointed a Community Gardens Coordinator, who works in the Parks and Recreation Department and helps train community leaders in the skills required to maintain the gardens. The Community Gardens Coordinator is currently working to create a database of suitable community gardening locations

in parks. However, to meet its own goal of putting a community garden into every ward in the city, the City will have to provide additional support to the Coordinator, to help community groups in the start-up phase of new gardens.

Recommendation 28: The City of Toronto should make the Community Gardens Coordinator a permanent position and hire two additional garden animators, at a cost of \$73,000, to meet its goal of ensuring that every Toronto ward has at least one community garden by 2003.

*Toronto's community gardens
produce an estimated
\$300,000 worth of food.*

Partner with the Toronto Community Garden Network

A number of partnerships have been created to enable certain groups to share the benefits of community gardening. For example:

- The Compost Council of Canada's "Plant-a-Row, Grow-a-Row" program, which began with several pilot projects in North York in 2000, encourages community gardeners to grow an extra row of produce that can be donated to food access programs. This project also encourages composting, which helps the City by reducing the amount of organic material that goes to landfill.
- A partnership among Human Resources Development Canada, FoodShare, AfriCan Food Basket, the Environmental Centre for New Canadians and others, worked with 70 youth from low-income families, many of whom were at risk of hunger. The participants learned horticultural skills and provided invaluable help with community garden start-ups. In return, the participants gained job and life skill experience.

Community garden leaders have also formed the Toronto Community Garden Network (TCGN), supported by FoodShare, which shares information, sponsors educational workshops and

tours, and publishes a weekly electronic newsletter with an events listing and tips on growing, storing and preparing urban harvests. The Network is involved in a variety of projects. For example, the Seeds of our City project, funded by the Bronfman Foundation, documents and analyses the seeds used by Toronto's diverse community of gardeners with a view to establishing a seedbank of international seeds adapted to Toronto's growing conditions.

The Food and Hunger Action Committee recognizes the working partnership between the City of Toronto and FoodShare in supporting community gardens. This partnership should be extended to the Toronto Community Garden Network. This would better serve all gardens that are members of TCGN, and eventually allow TCGN member gardens to apply for Toronto Parks and Recreation's minor recreation grants.

Recommendation 29: The City of Toronto should extend its partnership with FoodShare to include the Toronto Community Garden Network to ensure TCGN members access to assistance and resources from Toronto Parks and Recreation.

Use space on public land for community gardens

Existing allotment gardens are handled and administered differently by each of the former municipalities, but they all have one thing in common: long waiting lists. Decommissioned Hydro corridors and other vacant public lands offer land that can be quickly turned into allotments and given to the many people waiting for a plot.

Community gardens can also be put on rooftops or created in existing greenhouses. Greenhouses, which have stable temperatures and growing tables that can be adjusted for use by people with weak backs or people in wheelchairs, are often more accessible to older people and people in wheelchairs. Greenhouses also offer the opportunity for year-round gardening or a lengthening of the growing season. Toronto has 44 greenhouses in public and private ownership.

Most are used to grow flowers or plants used in science experiments.²⁵ Some are used for only part of the year. The City of Toronto could, in partnership with the greenhouse managers, make greenhouse space available in which community groups could start growing food. FoodShare and Toronto community gardeners have also put forward a proposal for a pilot compost-heated greenhouse, as another way to make good use of unused capacity and demonstrate an alternative strategy for heating greenhouses.

Recommendation 30: The City of Toronto should request all City departments and agencies to identify underused lands or greenhouses that could be made available to community gardeners working with the Community Garden Coordinator.

²⁵The Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic School Board together own 18 of them, the Department of Parks and Recreation has nine, the University of Toronto has three, the Bloorview Macmillan Centre has two, and the Body Shop, the French Catholic School District, FoodShare, Casa Loma (owned by the Kiwanis Club), the Toronto Housing Company, the Toronto Zoo, the YMCA and York University have one each. Three are of unknown ownership.

Promote children's gardening

The Children's Garden Program offers young people a chance to learn about, experience and enjoy urban ecology and organic gardening in Toronto's parks and ravines. Through hands-on, creative programming, children and youth are introduced to food preparation and nutrition, gardening, composting and related activities.

The Children's Garden Program has been growing organic vegetables, preparing them (along with other nutritious foods) and serving hundreds of meals to children, parents and volunteers since 1998. In 2000, more than 6,000 people visited the Children's Garden in High Park, and more than 2,000 people ate there. The children who participate in the Children's Garden Program learn about growing, preparing and eating organic vegetables; improve their health with outdoor physical activity; gain a better appreciation for the environment and landscape; meet other children, including children from different cultural groups; and boost their confidence and self-esteem.

The program could benefit children throughout the city. The Food and Hunger Action Committee



considers that three more children's gardens, located in the north, east and west of the city, would provide more equitable access to this important program.

Recommendation 31: The City of Toronto should allocate additional resources in 2002 to the Children's Garden Program, coordinated by Parks and Recreation to increase the number of children's gardens available to one per district by 2006 (an increase of three gardens).

Part Four: The City as Innovator in Food Security

Toronto is a leading food processing centre, second only to Chicago in North America. Food companies make up the largest group of businesses in the city. The city is renowned for the quality and variety of its restaurants, which contribute to its reputation as a tourist destination and convention and theatre centre. However, in some ways, Toronto has merely scratched the surface of the economic potential of food. There is money to be made and jobs to be created in promoting food security.

The recommendations in this section draw on a number of practical business precepts, many of which link social, economic and environmental benefits. This follows the approach taken by the Environmental Task Force, which developed the environmental plan adopted by Toronto City Council in 2000.

1. **Import substitution.** This means growing or processing food locally, rather than buying it from distant places. At present, millions of dollars flow out of Toronto to pay for items that could be produced in or close to the city. Keeping this money in the local economy helps keep direct jobs (growing or processing tomatoes, for example), induced jobs (making cans or bottles for the tomatoes, for instance) and indirect jobs (creating new goods and services for the new tomato grower and processor through the “multiplier effect”) in the city.
2. **Niche marketing.** Toronto’s multicultural and cosmopolitan population means that its mass market is actually made up of many different niches. Small-scale production

makes economic sense when the market for a certain kind of food is only a few thousand people.

3. **Locational advantage.** Toronto is well-situated, close to excellent sources of fresh water, close to first-class agricultural land, close to major Canadian and American markets, close to unique Toronto markets, and close to sources of low-cost recycled heat, water and compost. At present, Toronto is not making the most of its advantages.
4. **Multiple benefits.** It is quite possible to save money, create jobs, and improve the environment all at the same time. For example, installing a garden on the flat roof of an urban building provides the opportunity to grow saleable produce, create jobs, provide extra insulation for the building, make use of free inputs (sun, rain), and improve the air quality (growing plants emit oxygen). Multiple benefits mean multiple payoffs for each dollar invested.
5. **Unused capacity.** Toronto has many assets that it pays for but does not use to their fullest capacity: vacant lots, waste heat, empty rooftops, excess water runoff after heavy rain, compostable garbage, greenhouses that are not used year-round, church kitchens that sit empty on weekdays. The City can boost the productivity of its economy by putting its unused resources to work.

The recommendations that follow embody these business precepts in a variety of ways.

In 1996, 361 food and beverage processors operated in Toronto.

Support bulk purchasing by public service organizations

Toronto-based government agencies, community groups, non-profit organizations and charities spend about \$100 million a year on food. One emergency shelter for homeless people spends \$3 million a year on food, for example. Many millions more are spent by child nutrition programs, civic cafeterias, parks and recreation centres, child care centres, seniors homes, women's shelters, hospitals, and the like.

Few of these organizations take advantage of opportunities to pool their buying power. The City therefore forgoes the bulk discounts (usually about 10%) available for high-volume purchases of food. Toronto could use its purchasing power to go after these discounts and thereby feed a lot more people without having to ask taxpayers or contributors to charities for more money.

Toronto also does not take advantage of its purchasing power to support local farmers and processors, even though the Greater Toronto Area is

home to Canada's best agricultural lands. Many other governments, however, use their purchasing power to support the local economy.²⁶

If Toronto public agencies used their purchasing power to develop direct relationships with local farmers and food processors, the City might well save even more than 10%. Fresh produce farmers often have to scrap as much as 20% of the food they grow, simply because it fails to meet purely aesthetic criteria. The eggs, potatoes or apples may be too small; the carrots may be crooked or too stubby. Some foods may have minor blemishes that do not affect their nutritional value. But children don't care if an apple is small, and consumers of carrot soup, carrot cake or carrot juice don't care if the carrots that went into the food were an inch shorter than the supermarket standard. Bulk purchasing could bring this quality food to market, and thereby save the City money while putting money into the pockets of farmers who might otherwise let it rot.

²⁶For example, the State Finance Law of the State of New York includes a provision that "contracts for the purchase of food products on behalf of facilities and institutions of the state... may require provisions that mandate that the essential components of such food products are grown, produced or harvested in New York state, or that any processing of such food products take place in facilities located within New York state." Washington State and B.C. Ferries also support their local economies in similar ways.

Further innovations would become possible once Toronto flexed its purchasing muscles. For instance, the City could buy biodegradable cornstarch plates, containers and utensils, like the kinds used in the Sydney Olympics, and save on the waste management costs associated with meal programs offered in places without proper kitchen and dishwashing facilities. With volume buying, these items become affordable. The City would save on landfill costs and improve the local environment.

It is not necessary to create a new cooperative organization for government, non-profit and charitable food purchasers. Such an organization already exists. It is the provincially-sponsored Shared Services Bureau, which aggregates the purchasing power of Ontario's correctional institutes, the Ontario Fire College and the Ontario Police College. The Shared Services Bureau aggregates orders on behalf of its members and places them with a contracted supplier who delivers the purchases directly to the location where they will be used.

The Shared Services Bureau has a specific clause that provides for the inclusion of other organizations in the broader public service. Bureau staff have expressed interest in getting buy-in from Toronto. At the same time, a random survey of 30 Toronto agencies and community groups indicated a high level of interest in being part of such a procurement organization. The agencies want access to volume discounts. They also feel that they will

benefit from access to the Bureau's streamlined ordering procedures and bookkeeping, functions that tax their limited resources. Almost all respondents favoured a cooperative-style purchasing organization that would operate at arms' length from government and be flexible and transparent in its dealings with members.²⁷

Once established, the purchasing cooperative would be self-sustaining. Its own levies on members (about 3% on orders) would cover its administrative costs. However, there are start-up costs to making the option of bulk discounts known and available to potential members. Negotiations with the provincial agency will be necessary, since some broadening of the purchasing organization's mandate may need to be considered, if the purchase of fresh local foods is to be encouraged. As well, discussions with representatives of local farmers and processors will be necessary to provide local producers with the information they need to participate.

Recommendation 32: The City should request the Commissioner of Corporate Services to establish a working group of staff involved in purchasing, food policy and economic development, representatives of local growers and processors, and representatives of potential clients in City and community agencies, to review opportunities for buying food co-operatively at bulk rate discounts.

²⁷A cooperative structure operating at arm's length from the government also eliminates any basis for concern about intervention provoked by rulings of the World Trade Organization or North American Free Trade Agreement. A cooperative could organize its purchases in a way that advances the interests of members in acquiring fresh, minimally-packaged, healthful foods at reasonable costs, and any organization from any country that is capable of providing fresh, minimally-packaged and healthful food can bid for a co-op contract.

Support food microprocessors

Toronto offers a wealth of opportunities for small-scale food-based businesses.

Toronto is close to prime agricultural land that could supply raw materials for food-based businesses. One of the world's most multicultural cities, Toronto also abounds in niche markets for foods. Toronto residents include people from more than 120 nations, each with its own food traditions, as well as vegetarians and vegans, people with food allergies, religious groups who need kosher products or halal meat, and trend-setters in search of the Next New Thing. Toronto also attracts tourists who are interested in unique restaurants and one-of-a-kind gifts. Toronto also has a market for ready-made foods that require minimal preparation and yet are healthier and tastier than conventional fast foods.

As well, Toronto has the talent and labour needed to supply these markets. All that is lacking is some practical assistance getting off the ground. The City has one "incubator kitchen," run by FoodShare, that is available at nominal hourly rates for people

who want to start up small-scale food processing or catering businesses. However, more is needed to make businesses flourish. Micro businesses need help with business plans, financing, marketing, sales outlets, and connections to suppliers. They can band together to buy supplies in bulk at a discount, share expensive equipment, place cooperative advertising in appropriate markets, or find new retail opportunities. More often than not, help from government (or from some other kind of institution, such as a university or college) is needed with the initial organization of micro-processors, because solo bootstrap organizations with a great idea or product lack the resources for sustained marketing and product development.²⁸

Micro-processors can contribute to food security in at least three ways. They can provide stable incomes for thousands of new workers. They can provide food or food services to vulnerable groups, such as people with food sensitivities and ethno-cultural minorities. They can also take advantage of small batches of food (for example, off-sized produce) that

²⁸This is the case in New York State, Iowa and California, where universities and local governments provide micro-processors with virtually turnkey research and marketing operations. Despite rhetoric about solo entrepreneurs in the United States, there is considerable governmental and institutional support for micro-businesses.

can be made available at a discount and support local farmers who preserve Toronto's ever-shrinking greenbelt.

The Toronto Economic Development Strategy, adopted in July 2000, identified food and beverage processing as a crucial "cluster" in Toronto's economy. To strengthen this cluster, the Strategy commits to "priority actions" to help establish or broaden representation and activities of companies in this cluster, and to link companies in the cluster with appropriate investors, researchers, trainers and service providers.

Recommendation 33: The City of Toronto should request Economic Development to work with the Food Policy Council, representatives of the emerging food microprocessing industry and researchers, investors, trainers and others who can help this industry grouping meet its potential, and to develop a business strategy for this critical component in the food and beverage cluster of Toronto's economy.

Grow food in the city

Promote urban agriculture

Many major cities, as well as key United Nations agencies, promote urban agriculture.²⁹ Urban agriculture includes community gardening, but extends to larger, commercial operations that grow food close to where it will be consumed.

Locally-grown food is fresher and more nutritious,³⁰ because it is harvested closer to the time it is consumed and does not spend days in transit. It is often reasonably priced, because it does not include the cost of transportation. Also, growing food close to the city decreases the pollution

caused by long distance trucking of food.³¹ Another benefit is the opportunity to satisfy the needs of niche markets with small-scale urban agricultural operations.³²

Urban agriculture also benefits the local environment. Plants store carbon, release oxygen, and cool the summer air through transpiration. They also absorb rainwater, which would otherwise run into the storm sewer system, carrying contaminants from city streets into Lake Ontario. The urban soil can be enriched and conditioned with compost from local sources, which diverts

Toronto has roughly 500 hectares of land zoned agricultural and produces \$585 million in sales annually.

²⁹The potential of urban agriculture has been recognized in the United States, where Ken Dahlberg, an expert on food systems, has estimated that the value of the "backyard harvest" is \$17 billion a year — the same value as the entire corn crop of the United States.

³⁰Stored foods lose some vitamin content over time, as the organic compounds in them break down. Also, food is usually picked for shipping before it has reached its peak, on the assumption that it will "ripen in transit." These foods miss out on the nutrients that the sun and soil add in the last few days.

³¹The average distance food travels to Toronto is probably more than 2,000 kilometres a kilogram.

³²For example, the Royal York gets most of its herbs from a rooftop garden conditioned with restaurant compost. A farm in Scarborough provides dandelion greens to some restaurants, which use them in salads.

organic waste from landfill. The case can be made that locally-grown food pays for itself once through such environmental benefits, then pays for itself again when it is eaten.

The Toronto Food Policy Council has estimated that it would be possible to grow 10% or 16,700 tonnes of its own vegetables within or very close to the city limits. Urban farms do not take up much space. The existing farms within the city (there are 40 at present) are mostly smaller than 50 acres and some occupy only 2 hectares. These farms can be small and yet productive, because they use space more efficiently than rural farms.³³

The City of Toronto can help promote urban agriculture in a number of ways. First, it can act as an information broker, by making the specialized research on urban agriculture more widely available to potential growers. The City can encourage post-secondary institutions to cooperate to deliver courses and degree programs on urban agriculture (at present, conventional agriculture schools focus on industrial-scale agriculture). The City can also bring together growers and buyers so that growers will have a ready market for their products and buyers will be aware of local sources of specialty products. Finally, the City can sponsor research on the costs and benefits of innovations such as rooftop greenhouses and the use of recycled heat and water in urban agriculture.

Recommendation 34: The City of Toronto should promote urban agriculture by:

- setting up an interdepartmental group to advise City Council on guidelines suited to encourage private sector investment and involvement
- supporting the Toronto Food Policy Council's work with local post-secondary institutions to develop a unique program on urban agriculture
- supporting Economic Development, Culture and Tourism initiatives to link local growers and local retailers and restaurants
- requesting Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to identify private sector opportunities in food-producing rooftop greenhouses with a case study on the financial viability of at least one prototype
- requesting Works and Emergency Services to identify public infrastructure savings available to the City from urban agriculture's productive use of compost, waste heat, recycled water and other underused resources
- requesting staff preparing the Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan to identify opportunities for urban agriculture to contribute to cost-effective water management.

³³Helena Norberg-Hodge et al., *Bringing the Food Economy Home: The Social, Ecological and Economic Benefits of Local Food*, Dartington, Devon: International Society for Ecology and Culture, October 2000.

Build greenhouses on brownfield sites

New greenhouses could also be created in the city. The City is faced with the problem of finding new uses for abandoned industrial sites (brownfield sites) in the former Toronto, York and Scarborough. Some can be used for housing once contaminants have been removed from the soil, but this is a long, expensive and complicated process, both technically and politically. However, these sites could be put to use immediately, if commercial greenhouses were constructed on them. Because greenhouses are built on solid concrete floors and the plants do their growing above the ground, there is little or no risk of contamination from the underlying land.

Greenhouse technology is highly developed in Ontario. Growers within the city would have a competitive advantage in terms of speed to market. A number of Ontario greenhouse operators have expressed interest in the possibility of growing food products right in the middle of their most important market.

Putting greenhouses on brownfield sites makes economic sense.³⁴ Greenhouses that grow food for niche markets can command good prices for their products and can produce food out of season, when prices are highest for fresh food. Urban greenhouses can also take advantage of free or

low-cost resources, from waste heat from power plants to recycled water (such as stored rainwater from the roofs of buildings) to compost made from organic materials thrown out by local food stores.

Before embarking on such a project, the City needs to conduct a study on the costs, benefits and ramifications of using brownfield sites for greenhouses. There is also a need for pilot projects that can identify the best ways for a future industry to proceed. These studies would require the cooperation of the City's planners, economic development officers, food security specialists, and representatives of the Toronto Economic Development Corporation, which is responsible for the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

Toronto has approximately 150 hectares of vacant brownfields where greenhouses could go.

Recommendation 35: The City of Toronto should request the Commissioners of Urban Planning and Development Services and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, and representatives of the Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO) and the Toronto Food Policy Council to work with private-sector and community-based investors to facilitate pilot projects testing the viability of commercial greenhouses on brownfield sites.

³⁴This is certainly the experience of Buffalo, New York. Village Farms, Inc., is using hydroponics to grow vegetables in an 18-acre greenhouse on the site of the former Republic Steel Company. The main crops are tomatoes and red peppers. The greenhouse operation has created 100 full-time and 35 part-time jobs. Many of the jobs have been filled by former welfare recipients who live in downtown Buffalo. The capital cost for the Village Farms development was US\$15 million. A Toronto firm arranged the venture capital. The City of Buffalo negotiated a five-year lease to purchase the land, which was valued at US\$11,000 an acre. The city paid US\$860,000 for soil remediation, and agreed to tax concessions. Village Farms does not pay for the thermal energy they receive from a nearby cogeneration plant and they get a discounted price for electricity.

In 1999, 70% of organic waste was landfilled, leaving approximately 200,000 tonnes of organic waste unrecovered.

On average, each person in Ontario disposed of 348 kilograms of residential solid waste in 1996.

Work with food agencies to reduce waste

Every day in Toronto, tonnes of valuable foodstuffs are wasted. Most of these foodstuffs wind up in landfill, which costs about \$60 a tonne in trucking and tipping fees.³⁵

Food agencies and organizations can play a valuable role in rescuing more food and organics from landfill. At present, for instance, Toronto's food banks send about a million kilograms of inedible food to landfill every year. Much of the waste comes from perishables: produce or frozen food that could not be delivered fast enough, because the food banks have no delivery vans or freezers. Instead of investing money on vans and freezers, the City pays \$50,000 a year to haul once-decent food to landfill.

There are also possibilities for the food agencies to accept offers of quality food that they now cannot take because they lack facilities. If they had juicing machines and a way to bottle juices, they could accept donations of fresh produce.³⁶ If they had facilities for making soups, they could make use of non-standard-sized but otherwise nutritious vegetables.³⁷ If they



had composters, they could produce compost for community gardens.

³⁵It also has an environmental cost. At the landfill site, the organic matter decomposes and becomes liquid. It trickles down to the bottom of the landfill site, picking up contaminants as it goes, eventually carrying them into the water table. Rotting food in landfill also gives off methane, which is about 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide in contributing to global warming.

³⁶At present, Second Harvest does deliver food to food preparation programs, where it is processed. However, this economic opportunity needs to be extended.

³⁷Vegetables or eggs that are too small, or fresh produce that is oddly shaped (carrots that are not perfectly straight or peppers that are lopsided) do not meet government standards for food sold through regular stores; large amounts of this kind of nutritious food are consequently wasted.

The private sector already contributes generously to support food banks. Truckers donate their trucks and time, and supermarkets and processors donate food. Now the public sector needs to help. Food agency leaders are eager to work with the City to divert food and organic waste from landfill to a variety of other useful projects. Some of these projects could save the City money that is currently being spent on landfill, while creating jobs and training opportunities.

Recommendation 36: The City of Toronto should request the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services to work with community food agencies to explore programs that divert organic materials from the waste stream and convert unused foodstuffs into valuable products by:

- ❖ determining the amount of food that is wasted and what opportunities exist to create waste diversion programs
- ❖ setting up an interdepartmental advisory committee (sponsored by Works and Emergency Services together with Public Health) to help food agencies organize safe and high-quality use of food surpluses
- ❖ exploring options for employment and training initiatives to create jobs in spin-off businesses, with Human Resources Development Canada and corporate funding
- ❖ sponsoring a pilot program to help food agencies compost material that would otherwise go to landfill and to determine the resulting cost savings for the City
- ❖ helping food agencies obtain capital equipment (such as trucks, refrigerators and processing equipment) through government or private funding
- ❖ considering the most cost-effective methods of supporting food agency participation in waste reduction programs.

Canada produced 3.9 million tonnes of residential solid waste in 1996, making it fifth in the world in per capita residential waste disposal, after the United States, Australia, Netherlands and Japan.

Part Five: Implementing the Food and Hunger Action Plan

This report is part of a long-term process of making Toronto a more food-secure city. Not long ago, food security was taken for granted in this city. Today, it is generally understood that food security depends on a wide range of factors, including housing costs, economic development and environmental protection. This understanding poses new challenges, but offers new opportunities as well. As a result, it is important that the Food and Hunger Action Committee continue its work beyond adoption of this report. There are two main reasons for this.

First, the City's Food Charter and Food and Hunger Action Plan are new and innovative. The proposed policies, programs and services need to be monitored and evaluated as they are implemented to ensure that the City is achieving its goals and getting value and results for taxpayers' money. The Food and Hunger Action Committee's experience over two years of preparing this report suits it for this ongoing task.

Second, the process that led to this report inspired an astonishingly wide range of citizens and

public interest groups to take part in constructive discussions and partnerships and to consider new projects and perspectives. For example, some emergency food providers embraced ideas about waste diversion and micro-processing, two exciting and productive projects for the city's economy and environment as well as its food security. A number of business and public organizations came forward with proposals for special donations, once they got the sense that the City would cooperate and help them make a difference. The very existence of the Food and Hunger Action Committee, in other words, served as a magnet for goodwill and partnerships. Neither the City nor its food security groups can afford to cut this process short.

Because the issues are complex, the Food and Hunger Action Committee does not have a detailed blueprint for the future. But the process and structures that need to be put in place are nevertheless clear. Open communication and cooperation among City departments and community groups are essential to food security in Toronto.

Recommendation 37: The City of Toronto should request the Food and Hunger Action Committee, in collaboration with members of the Community Reference Group, to oversee implementation of the recommendations in this report and to provide a comprehensive progress report to City Council in the fall of 2002.

The Toronto Food Policy Council and the Social Development and Administration Division are in a good position to work with both the Food and Hunger Action Committee and staff from all departments to monitor implementation of the Food and Hunger Action Plan.

Recommendation 38: The City of Toronto should request staff with the Toronto Food Policy Council and Social Development and Administration Division to take the lead in setting up an interdepartmental staff group (comprised of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, Urban Planning and Development, Corporate Services, Public Health, Community and Neighbourhood Services, Works and Emergency Services) that will develop a comprehensive work plan to support and monitor implementation of the recommendations in this report.



Summary of recommendations

Because poverty, not a shortage of food, is the major cause of hunger, and because all levels of government need to work together on long-term solutions to hunger, the City of Toronto should:

1. Renew its request to the Province of Ontario to increase the shelter component maximum of social assistance to reflect local market rents, increase funding for rent supplements and create a new shelter allowance program targeted to the working poor, as recommended by the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.
2. Once again ask the Province of Ontario to rescind its decision on the National Child Benefit Supplement and allow families receiving social assistance benefits to keep all income received from the supplement as a way to improve the incomes of low-income families.
3. Urge the federal and provincial governments to act on the recommendations contained in the Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001.

Because the Province of Ontario has responsibilities and resources to develop positive food, nutrition and agricultural programs that contribute to food security, the City of Toronto should:

4. Continue to advocate to the Province of Ontario to establish a comprehensive provincial food and nutrition strategy and provide funding to the Ontario Public Health Association to support a full-time provincial food security co-ordinator.

5. Ask the Province of Ontario to match the City's contribution to Child Nutrition Programs in Toronto.
6. Urge the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, in cooperation with the Toronto District School Board, to ensure that all newly-constructed schools and all renovations to schools include adequate kitchen facilities and lunch rooms for students, and to ensure that all students have adequate time in their school schedule to eat a healthy lunch.
7. Urge the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to include urban agriculture in the Healthy Futures Funding Program.

The federal government can coordinate food security at the national level, and ensure food security through its own programs. Therefore the City of Toronto should:

8. Urge Health Canada to initiate a national food and nutrition monitoring system; to support this system, Statistics Canada should include questions that monitor food insecurity in a national population-level survey to determine the extent and nature of hunger in Canada.
9. Urge Health Canada to increase funding for nutritious foods for the participants of the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program, in order that programs do not have to rely on food banks.

The City of Toronto, in its role as a health promoter, disseminates information that will contribute to food security and should therefore:

10. Request that the Chair of the Board of Health bring a summary of the annual estimate of the cost of a nutritious food basket in Toronto before City Council, so that City Council can use the estimates to make its case for provincial and federal measures to address food security in the city.
11. Support Toronto Public Health, in collaboration with its community partners, in its efforts to enhance nutrition and food security information and links on the City's website.
12. Support Community and Neighbourhood Services and other agencies working with people with disabilities by helping to disseminate information on income assistance programs to ensure that disabled people receive benefits for which they qualify.

The City can make room for food security initiatives in City-owned buildings and promote food security in schools and social housing. Therefore it should:

13. Request Corporate Services, Community and Neighbourhood Services, and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to prepare a report providing an inventory of kitchen facilities and spaces owned by the City and its agencies, and appropriate policy guidelines governing their use by community-based food security groups; this report should be presented to City Council in December 2001.

14. Request that Facilities and Real Estate and Parks and Recreation, in co-operation with Toronto Public Health, develop guidelines for the construction and renovation of City-owned buildings to ensure that kitchen facilities are adequate for community food security programs.
15. Request the Toronto Food Policy Council, in consultation with the Toronto Housing Company and Metropolitan Toronto Housing Corporation (formerly MTHA), form a working group with appropriate City staff and community partners to report on the opportunities to expand community food initiatives in the City's social housing portfolio, by September 2002.

The City should do its part to ensure that all Toronto residents have access to nutritious food and should therefore:

16. Enhance the Community and Neighbourhood Services Community Services Grants program by \$250,000 a year for the next three years to fund a three-year pilot program employing four Community Food Co-ordinators placed with community agencies across the city.
17. Request that Community and Neighbourhood Services and Urban Planning and Development Services, in consultation with the Toronto Food Policy Council, conduct a study to identify areas in the city in which food retail access is inadequate and to prepare a list of options the City can consider to remedy this problem, to be submitted to City Council by January 2002.

18. Encourage Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to continue providing space for farmers' markets at civic centres to add vitality to these public spaces as well as to provide an opportunity for Torontonians to meet local farmers and buy the freshest food possible.
19. Pilot a special community market for neighbourhoods underserved by conventional food stores to increase Toronto residents' opportunities to purchase fresh and affordable food.

Volunteers are essential to the functioning of many of Toronto's food programs. Toronto should recognize their contribution:

20. Community and Neighbourhood Services should establish a Community Food Initiatives Awards Program to honour the contributions of the volunteers who support the city's community-based food security sector.

Toronto's existing food programs are essential to the promotion of food security in the city. The City of Toronto should therefore:

21. Continue to fund the Child Nutrition Program according to the shared funding partnership model.
22. Provide \$27,000 for a summer pilot project that employs secondary school students to provide nutritious snacks to children enrolled in City-run summer programs.

23. Maintain its support for congregate dining and meal programs that help meet the nutritional needs of seniors.
24. Request the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to work with emergency shelters and related programs to develop a policy encouraging meal options that are both nutritious and appropriate for people subject to dietary, cultural and ethical restrictions.
25. The City of Toronto should provide \$106,500 to ensure continuation of the peer education component of the partnership with community agencies involved with the Cooking Healthy Together program in 2001, and to enable staff and the community agencies involved to seek alternative long-term sources of funding for this program.

Community groups build self-reliance among Toronto's residents. The City can support their efforts to make the city more food-secure and:

26. Establish a three-year Food Alternatives Grants program as a pilot project under the Community Services Grants Program, to enable community groups and agencies to plan their activities; the pilot project would continue for three years with \$500,000 in funding for each year.
27. Pilot a two-year Community Food Initiatives project funding stream under the Community Service Grants Program; the funding would be \$250,000 a year in 2002 and 2003.

Community gardens grow food, beautify the city, strengthen communities, contribute to the self-reliance of the people who work in them, and improve the environment. The City should therefore:

28. Make the Community Gardens Coordinator a permanent position and hire two additional garden animators, at a cost of \$73,000, to meet its goal of ensuring that every Toronto ward has at least one community garden by 2003.
29. Extend its partnership with FoodShare to include the Toronto Community Garden Network to ensure TCGN members access to assistance and resources from Toronto Parks and Recreation.
30. Request all City departments and agencies to identify underused lands or greenhouses that could be made available to community gardeners working with the Community Garden Co-ordinator.
31. Allocate additional resources in 2002 to the Children's Garden Program, coordinated by Parks and Recreation, to increase the number of children's gardens available to one per district by 2006 (an increase of three gardens).

Toronto can benefit from food security initiatives that create jobs, improve the environment, and keep money in Toronto. The City should therefore:

32. Request the Commissioner of Corporate Services to establish a working group of staff involved in purchasing, food policy and economic development, representatives of local growers and processors, and representatives

of potential clients in City and community agencies, to review opportunities for buying food co-operatively at bulk rate discounts.

33. Request that Economic Development, Culture and Tourism work with the Toronto Food Policy Council, representatives of the emerging food microprocessing industry and researchers, investors, trainers and others who can help this industry grouping meet its potential, and to develop a business strategy for this critical component in the food and beverage cluster of Toronto's economy.
34. Promote urban agriculture by:
 - ❖ setting up an interdepartmental group to advise City Council on guidelines suited to encourage private sector investment and involvement
 - ❖ supporting the Toronto Food Policy Council's work with local post-secondary institutions to develop a unique program on urban agriculture
 - ❖ supporting Economic Development, Culture and Tourism initiatives to link local growers and local retailers and restaurants
 - ❖ requesting Economic Development, Culture and Tourism to identify private-sector investment opportunities in food-producing rooftop greenhouses with a case study on the financial viability of at least one prototype
 - ❖ requesting Works and Emergency Services to identify public infrastructure savings available to the City from urban

- agriculture's productive use of compost, waste heat, recycled water and other underused resources
- requesting staff preparing the Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan to identify opportunities for urban agriculture to contribute to cost-effective water management.
35. Request the Commissioners of Urban Planning and Development and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism and representatives of the Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO) and the Toronto Food Policy Council to work with private-sector and community-based investors and operators to facilitate pilot projects testing the viability of commercial greenhouses on brownfield sites.
36. Request the Commissioner of Works and Emergency Services to work with community food agencies to explore programs that divert organic materials from the waste stream and convert foodstuffs into valuable products by:
- determining the amount of food that is wasted and what opportunities exist to create waste diversion programs
 - setting up an interdepartmental advisory committee (sponsored by Works and Emergency Services together with Public Health) to help food agencies organize safe and high-quality food surpluses
 - exploring options for employment and training initiatives to create jobs in spin-off businesses, with Human Resources Development Canada and corporate funding
 - sponsoring a pilot program to help food agencies compost material that would otherwise go to landfill and to determine the resulting cost savings for the City
 - helping food agencies obtain capital equipment (such as trucks, refrigerators and processing equipment) through government or private funding
 - considering the most cost-effective methods of supporting food agency participation in waste reduction programs.
- This Action Plan is the first step. Food security is a long-term goal and can only be reached by cooperation, collaboration and ongoing dialogue. Therefore the City of Toronto should:**
37. Request the Food and Hunger Action Committee to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in this report, and to provide a comprehensive progress report to City Council in the fall of 2002.
38. Request staff with the Toronto Food Policy Council and Social Development and Administration Division to take the lead in setting up an interdepartmental staff group (comprised of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, Urban Planning and Development, Corporate Services, Public Health, Community and Neighbourhood Services and Works and Emergency Services) that will develop a comprehensive work plan to support and monitor the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

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