

Food bank shelves show gaps as summer donations lag, ahead of critical fall stretch

By Sam Odrowski

As Orangeville Food Bank shelves thin out heading into September, Executive Director Heather Hayes says the items missing most aren't always what people expect.

"Hygiene products are always a struggle," Hayes said. "So are cleaning products. If you didn't have money for food, hygiene products are slightly lower on that list. And if you didn't have money for hygiene products, you probably don't have money for cleaning products, and a lot of people miss that."

Hayes said the shortage extends to basic cooking staples; items she describes as essential but easy for donors to overlook.

"If I look out at the shelves right now, there are six bottles of oil on the shelf for 1,600 people rolling through the food bank, and I have one bottle of mustard and two bottles of ketchup, one jar of mayonnaise," Hayes said.

"Everything has a cost to it... condiments, spices, oils - they all are integral to making something taste good or being able to cook something. There's no entree that you make starts without a fat. It just doesn't exist, whether it's coconut oil, ghee, olive oil or butter. We don't get any of those kinds of things."

Hayes said the food bank sees donations decline predictably each summer, a pattern that makes the weeks ahead especially important.

"We tend to fall off people's radars during the summer," Hayes said. "You get busy, you're out to the cottage, that kind of thing. But as September rolls around, our programs are really critical to making sure that everybody's got the food they need."

She said the food bank is looking for donations across the board as the season turns.

"We're open to anything," Hayes said. "Come on down."