

Giving Thanks

by SHERALYN ROMAN

For many of us, this is the time of year we are able to join with family and dine together. Aptly named, after an abundant harvest, Thanksgiving is the time for us to literally share in nature's bounty with those around us. If you are lucky enough to be sitting down for a meal with family and friends this weekend, this is your gentle reminder to be grateful. Life might not be perfect, but easy access to food is reason enough to be thankful this thanksgiving season. For too many others, with grocery store prices skyrocketing, not only is Thanksgiving dinner not assured, neither are school lunches nor healthy breakfasts on a regular basis. While in the global context this is clearly unacceptable, it seems egregiously so in a country like ours where food grows (as long as we don't pave over all the farmland) in abundance and the variety is seemingly boundless.

Locally there are field to farm markets including Caledon's own Downey's Farm, Albion Orchards and the Albion Hills Community Farm, while just a short drive north will land you in Dufferin County where roadside farmers' stands abound and places like Maple Grove Farm Market are waiting to serve you. Perhaps you'll take the extra holiday Monday and plan an outing with your family, pick up a pumpkin or two and bring home a baked treat for dessert. Life is good when food is this plentiful AND you can afford to pay for it. Try to imagine what it's like however, when surrounded by such largesse, but you have to choose between a roof over your head OR food on the table. If Thanksgiving is in part about giving thanks and celebrating with food and family ? consider also making it about sharing the abundant harvest and donating what you can (whether food or funds) to local community and faith-based organizations who will endeavour as they always do, to ensure those experiencing food scarcity might also be able to give thanks with a dining table heavy with harvest foods this upcoming weekend.

Alongside your ability to donate, consider fresh foods as these are often left off food bank shelves. In fact, right now the items most in need at our local Exchange and area food banks include: fresh fruits like apples, oranges, pears and bananas along with vegetables like potatoes, carrots, onions and other seasonal vegetables. Also needed are milk, eggs, butter, cheese and yogurt. Many of us think of pasta, peanut butter and perhaps even pantry staples when donating food but items like condiments are often forgotten. School-friendly granola bars and juice boxes are always needed. In addition to fresh milk, ?shelf-stable? milk such as almond, evaporated or powdered milk goes a long way as do products like toothpaste and tampons that can be costly when budgets are already stretched thin.

While statistics vary between communities, in some areas there has been a greater than 100% increase in the amount of working families that now rely on food banks for all or some of their nutritional requirements. These are families who are employed yet still must make difficult decisions around where to allocate limited income resources. Imagine working two jobs and still having to rely on a food bank to meet some of your family's grocery needs! If a trip to the grocery store has you considering the rapidly rising cost of living and you are employed, have a home and access to transportation, think about what a trip to the store looks like for someone living on ODSP, reliant upon public transportation (virtually non-existent in Caledon) and who may be unhoused or underhoused. At just \$755 per month, and the average rent in Caledon often as much as two to three times that amount, it doesn't take a mathematician to figure out how untenable your situation is.

What else can you do? Consider lending your voice to the environmental groups advocating on behalf of the farmlands and greenbelts that surround us. The greenbelt issue hasn't gone away and the plans to develop the 413 are still very much on the table and they would have a significant impact on local farmland. Homes and highways built by developers put our food supply at risk. These are the folks who already have enough: enough land, enough money and enough influence. Help continue to send that message to Mr. Ford. The land needs protecting not just for the sake of species at risk, the environment and to protect the watershed but in order to be able to help feed families too.

Finally, the Coalition for Healthy Food has been campaigning under the banner of #NourishKidsNow! for access to healthy school lunches for all Canadian school children, something the liberal government committed over \$1 billion dollars toward during the last federal election campaign but which currently remains in limbo. Imagine if every child, regardless of their socio-economic

condition, had equal access to the same healthy, nutritious food at lunch? This one act alone would be an important step toward addressing inequities in educational opportunities, helping to "level the playing field" for every student. Food doesn't just nourish healthy bodies, but healthy minds too. They are currently providing access to a petition on their website, asking the government to honour the commitment made. You can learn more about the petition and sign it on or before October 20.

This Thanksgiving, if you're able, consider a new way of giving thanks, by giving back.