

Jones supports Tory plan to fight hunger with local food

The Progressive Conservative Caucus at Queen's Park) has announced it is putting forward an amendment to the Local Food Act which would add a tax credit for farmers who donate products to their local food bank.

"Ontario has stagnated with little economic growth and high unemployment across the province," said Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones. "While the PC Caucus's priority is to provide a path to grow our economy and create jobs, we also recognize today's reality that many Ontarians struggle to put food on their tables and need to look to their local food bank for assistance. This amendment is a simple thing we can do that will make a big difference to those families."

Modeled on Sarnia Lambton MPP Bob Bailey's private members bill, Fighting Hunger with Local Food Act, the amendment would grant a non-refundable tax credit worth 25 per cent of the wholesale value to farmers who choose to donate their excess agricultural products to local food banks. The bill would also permit unused tax credits to be carried forward up to five years.

Each year, while food banks struggle to provide for those in need, Ontario farmers dispose of, or plow back into their fields, more than 25 million pounds of fresh, nutritious food. Jones stated this food is healthy, tasty and fresh, but is not chosen for sale by grocers because of cosmetic reasons such as size, shape or colour. Many farmers cannot afford the additional costs incurred to collect, process and deliver their unsold produce to local food banks, despite a clear desire in the industry to do so.

In April 2011, Peel Region passed a resolution calling for the Ontario legislature to support Bailey's bill.

Jones pointed out that currently the Local Food Act does nothing to increase the consumption of local food outside of government buildings. The PC Caucus has already announced an amendment to increase food literacy by requiring food education as a mandatory component of instruction for pupils in every grade.

"The PC Caucus believes that Ontario deserves a comprehensive Food Act that addresses the challenges that our food system and farmers are facing," Jones commented. "That's why we are putting forward amendments such as this tax credit, which will help our farmers and ensure that people using Ontario's food banks will have more access to fresh, high quality Ontario food."