



Response to “Building Ontario’s First Food Security Strategy”

May 31, 2017

Dear Minister Ballard,

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to your discussion paper on “Building Ontario’s First Food Security Strategy”. The Ontario Home Economics Association (OHEA), a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life. Our members are educated and knowledgeable in such areas as nutrition, food production and preparation, clothing, child development, family resource and development, housing, consumer issues and family relationships. We work in the education, health and food systems as public servants, primary, secondary and post-secondary educators, food industry consultants, authors, entrepreneurs and researchers.

We are in general agreement with the four broad areas of focus or four pillars of the proposed strategy components: empowered communities with custom-made solutions, integrated food initiatives that use knowledge to drive collective impact, food security beyond food and driving innovation. We are concerned though that the concepts of food security (empowered communities, integrated food initiatives, driving innovation) and food insecurity are conflated.

To be clear we begin with the suggestion to separate the issue of food insecurity (area of focus #3) from food security, or what can also be viewed as programming and initiatives meant to ensure universal access to healthy and safe food through a vibrant and resilient food system and strong food literacy rates throughout the population. (1) We suggest a glossary of terms (see Appendix A) to avoid confusion and facilitate the building of common agendas.

Food insecurity is a result of insufficient income or financial constraints and is measured through the Canadian Community Health Survey. We urge the Ontario government to reverse its decision on this matter and instead confirm its commitment to continuous monitoring of food insecurity through participation in the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) on the annual cycles of Statistics Canada’s Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). (2) This is a valid and reliable method to accurately monitor and capture a true picture of progress initiated by Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy. Additionally, we also recommend Nutritious Food Basket Costing to remain a mandated annual public health activity used for assessment, measurement, and intervention. (3)

Food security is not the direct opposite of food insecurity. It is broader. We use the terms healthy food access, food system and food literacy as a method to clarify the difference and recognize that alone these cannot alleviate poverty or insufficient income. (4) The alleviation of individual and household food insecurity requires targeted income-based policies such as those recommended by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals and Dietitians of Canada. (5,6). With others we await the evidence on the effectiveness, feasibility and efficiencies of Ontario's basic income guarantee pilot, itself an innovation and urge other income-related policy reforms in the meantime.

Having said this, we also put a strong importance on the ability of all Ontarians to live, work, learn, play and age in environments that make the healthy food choice the easiest choice supported by evidence-informed policy and regulation. As well Ontarians should have equitable opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills, access the infrastructure, and maintain the motivation to be food literate.

Minister Ballard, we notice a gap in reference to the role that education and skill building can play in accessing, growing, preparing, storing and enjoying healthy and safe food. Further topics include food waste reduction, the food system as a whole and the interconnectedness of its parts. (7) Across the lifecycle, income brackets and even education levels we see a dramatic loss of food knowledge and skills. (8) There is a reduction of knowledgeable and skilled gatekeepers in the home. To date over 4000 have signed the OHEA petition calling on the Ontario government to make at least one food and nutrition course compulsory in Ontario secondary schools. (9)

OHEA does not have representation from the North however we do feel it imperative to find sensitive, meaningful and accessible ways to include the voice of those with the lived experience of food insecurity and those who, because of geography, health status, living conditions etc., are unable to access healthy and safe food or know how best to use it. Qualitative data through stories can enhance population level numbers. These stories can also be used to reduce stigmatization and help Ontario move beyond the charity model to feed those who cannot afford to feed themselves. We would like to see a strategy that connects initiatives co-created by end-users through a back and forth flow of information, like a spider web.

We agree that integrated food initiatives that use knowledge can drive collective impact. We see the value of a strategy that tries to break down silos. We hope this leads to a long-term, non-partisan commitment to coordinate, streamline and communicate efforts using a common language with built-in monitoring and evaluation. Ontario should be able to recognize and celebrate success, identify gaps and avoid duplication of efforts in a multi-pronged food strategy.

In addition to the citizenry, we support making connections with diverse groups working in the non-profit sector and organizations such as individual public health units, family health teams, community health centres, Canadian community food centres, schools, community garden and local food networks and policy councils in order gather valuable insight and information on the progress, success and lessons learned of existing community-based initiatives. Input from all these players would assist inter-ministerial analysis work that could lead to a comprehensive view of community and regional needs both for income-based and food system and food literacy solutions.

We see the education setting as one prime for innovation. The adverse effects of food insecurity on student achievement (10, 11, 12, 13) must be emphasized in a robust, meaningful strategy. Education helps individuals define a good life and discover the means to fulfill it. Overlooking the barriers that food insecurity present to such educational and life aims ignores an important moral dimension that exists in addition to the well documented health and social issues. There is a range of regulated health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and occupational therapists connected to the education setting. There is however an absence of registered dietitians on these schools teams who deal with issues of delayed or problematic individual academic achievement. Including registered dietitians in clinical assessments of student learning and classroom behaviour would provide individuals the opportunity to receive interventions toward success.

We see technology and social enterprise as methods of innovation. For example credible on-line videos can demonstrate safe food shopping and handling, preparation, preservation, storage, plot and container gardening and positive role modeling of family and communal meals. Within the food system community cooperatives for food preparation, storage and sales can contribute to local economies and could be mandated to serve a second purpose, which is to provide locations for community-based food literacy programming.

Minister Ballard, we see that a provincial food strategy requires three common goals. The first is to reduce poverty and food insecurity. The second is to have a healthy, resilient and safe food system with policies that support access to healthy food environments where we live, work, learn, play and age. And, the third is to ensure equitable access to those elements that will allow all Ontarians the choice to prepare and enjoy safe, nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food. These goals can be achieved through comprehensive situational assessments (14), clear and ongoing two-way communication and sustainable and viable initiatives that are not charity or volunteer based.

Sincerely,

The Ontario Home Economics Association

<http://www.ohea.on.ca/>

Appendix A: Using a common language:

- Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. Its root cause is poverty.¹
¹<https://www.osnp-ph.on.ca/upload/membership/document/2016-02/position-statement-2015-final.pdf> accessed 29 May 2017.
- Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.²
²Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2001. The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Retrieved from http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/y1500e/y1500e06.htm#PO_2 accessed 17 mar 2017
- Food literacy is a set of skills and attributes that help people sustain the daily preparation of healthy, tasty, affordable meals for themselves and their families. Food literacy builds resilience, because it includes food skills (techniques, knowledge and planning ability), the confidence to improvise and problem solve, and the ability to access and share information.³
³<https://www.osnp-ph.on.ca/upload/membership/document/food-literacy-study.ldcpontario.final.dec2013.pdf> accessed 29 May 2017

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