

# **Working Together for Equal Access to Food**

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The Food Partners Alliance (FPA) works to support the implementation of the Simcoe County Food and Agriculture Charter while providing leadership to build a sustainable and equitable food system.

As part of the Charter, equal access to food is a key principle that the Alliance hopes to guide and encourage community partners to implement. Equal access to food refers to the basic right of all people to have access to healthy and good quality food that is personally-acceptable and provides adequate nutrients to sustain the dietary needs of every individual, regardless of social and economic status.

Food must be affordable for consumers and producers to ensure food security and food system stability. Partners within the community have assisted to ensure that members within the community have access to local foods by removing physical and financial barriers. This has been done by increasing access to places where people can buy, grow or otherwise obtain healthy foods while promoting healthy eating.

"Wasaga Beach Community Garden is an incredible vehicle to help reduce isolation amongst community members and generate new friendships while improving health," says Courtney O'Neill, Registered Dietitian for the South Georgian Bay Community Health Centre regarding one of the many initiatives the organization leads in providing greater equal access to food. "At the Centre we [also] purchase a monthly Good Food Box so members within the community can access vegetables and fruits for free."

O'Neil has been recognized by her peers in the agri-food sector through the 2015 Simcoe County Food and Agriculture Champion Awards, where she received the Community Appreciation Award for Improving Food Access.

Earlier this month, The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) celebrated Food Freedom Day in recognition of the date by which the average Canadian will have earned enough income to pay for his or her grocery bill for 2016. The awareness day also aimed to bring awareness to the impact of increases in food prices on day-to-day budgets. It is estimated that in 2015, Canadians spent 11 per cent of their disposable income on food, compared to 10.4 per cent in 2014.

Equal Access to food is an important topic within the greater umbrella of food security and it is important that the community continues to work together to help ensure that our residents have access to food.

"When Simcoe County residents with lived experience of poverty were engaged through the Voices of Poverty Project, they had identified that access to food was one of the greatest difficulties while experiencing poverty," says Trevor McAlmont, Program Supervisor, Community Services, County of Simcoe.

By providing greater equal access to food, we, as a community, can reduce hunger and help reduce poverty.