



Hunger Report 2013

Ontario Association of Food Banks

A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Ontario and recommendations for change



About the OAFB

Founded in 1992, the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) is a network of 127 food banks, and over 1,100 hunger relief programs and agencies, across Ontario. This includes: breakfast clubs, school meal programs, community kitchens, community gardens, emergency shelters, and seniors centres. Together, we serve over 375,000 Ontarians every single month.

Throughout our network, food banks across the province are working hard to address emergency food needs and long-term food insecurity through a wide variety of innovative programs. From community gardens and skill-building workshops to on-site dental and public health services, Ontario's food banks have become centres for support, innovation, and community.

The OAFB, alongside the food banks within its network, is working very hard to address the root-causes of hunger and to develop sustainable solutions that ultimately make food bank use unnecessary.

The following report details the Ontario findings of Food Banks Canada's annual HungerCount survey.

The Face of Hunger

In March of this year, **375,789** people across the province accessed Ontario's food banks. This is higher than the total population of London, Ontario or of cities such as Guelph, Kingston, and Thunder Bay combined.

It is hard to imagine that in a province and a country with so much, that there are this many individuals, children, and families accessing hunger relief services. Every day, food banks across the province are working hard to provide food and support to hundreds of thousands of Ontarians whose resources are simply insufficient to provide themselves and their families with enough food to eat.

While client numbers have dropped from last year's record-high of 412,998 Ontarians per month, the number of individuals accessing Ontario's food banks still exceeds that of the 2008 recession (374,230) and is still significantly higher than the pre-recession numbers of 2006 and 2007 (330,491 and 318,540 respectively). In March 2013, 186,467 households accessed food banks, 16,294 of which did so for the very first time. This is alarming, and astounding.



| Demographics | Ontario (total) | Rural Ontario |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Women 18+ | 45 | 46.7 |
| Post Secondary Students | 3.7 | 1.5 |
| Senior Citizens 65+ | 3.9 | 4.4 |
| Aboriginal Persons | 6.3 | 17.2 |
| Immigrants or Refugees | 11.1 | 0.2 |

| Family Composition | Ontario (total) | Rural Ontario |
|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| % Single Parent Families | 25.6 | 21.4 |
| % Two-Parent Families | 20.5 | 25.2 |
| % Couples With No Children | 10.3 | 14.4 |
| % Single People | 43.6 | 39 |

Food bank clients are often not who you might expect. As our economy changes, along with social services and support networks, the face of hunger is also changing.

Children under 18 years of age are the largest group of food bank users in Ontario, with more than **131,734** children accessing food banks each month.

Food bank clients also include post-secondary students, highly educated individuals and recent university graduates, senior citizens, wage workers, single parent households, and Ontarians with disabilities.



131,734 Children
access food banks every month.

| Income Source | Ontario (total) | Rural Ontario |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| % Job Income | 10.9 | 11.0 |
| % Federal Employment Insurance | 3.1 | 4.9 |
| % Social Assistance | 42.0 | 33.3 |
| % Provincial Disability Support | 27.4 | 34.4 |
| % Private Disability Plan | 0.9 | 1.8 |
| % Pension Income | 6.3 | 8.9 |
| % Student Loans/scholarships | 0.9 | 1.2 |
| % No Income | 4.7 | 2.5 |
| % Other Income | 3.8 | 2.1 |

There are a number of reasons that one might reach out to a food bank for support, such as a lost job or reduced hours at work, a recent or long-term disability, or as a newcomer to the country trying to build a new life. Fundamentally, however, it is because they simply do not have sufficient resources to afford all of their monthly expenses, including food.

Social Assistance and Disability Support are most often indicated as the primary source of income by food bank clients. In fact, 69% of food bank clients rely on either Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program as their primary means of support for day to day living. As social assistance programs are the largest support services for food bank users, it is fair to say that what these subsidies are is not enough. A single person on Ontario Works, for example, only receives \$626 per month on the program.¹

In combination with rent, hydro, and personal care, it is not surprising that many of those obtaining social assistance require food bank support as well. This is especially true as cost of living and food prices continue to rise.

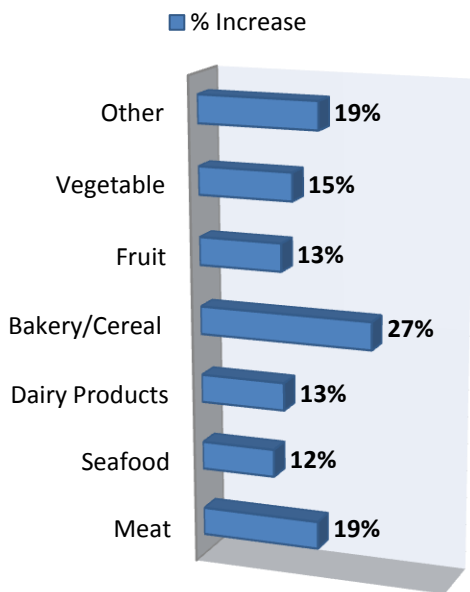


65% of food bank clients are rental tenants



While *only* **0.4%** are homeless

Changes in Consumer Food Price 2007-2012



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 326-0021. ⁴

This year, Statistics Canada data revealed that food prices rose 2.5 percent in 2012. This is after rising 3.8 percent in 2011 and 1.4 percent in 2010.² It has also reported that the average household in Ontario spends approximately \$379 per month on groceries. For individuals on social assistance, with an income of slightly over \$600 per month, this is simply not possible with all other expenses.

One of the largest growing groups of food bank users in Ontario is students and recent university graduates. While this group *only* accounts for 1% of total food bank users, the number of clients who indicate student loans/ scholarships as their primary source of income has increased from 0.2% in rural Ontario to 1.2% this year alone. It has become difficult to find a university or college campus without a food bank or hunger relief program. What's more, recent graduates often find themselves leaving school with astronomical debts and significant challenges in finding a well-paying job in their field. The Canadian Federation of Students reported that the average student in Canada graduates university with \$37,000 of debt.³



More than a Food Bank

While the face of hunger continues to change and evolve in Ontario, food banks are adapting into centres of social change in order to meet the needs of the thousands of individuals that they serve each month. Across our network of 127 food banks, there are innovative and unique programs that have been created to help nourish and assist food bank clients. The Ontario Association of Food Banks knows that hunger is a symptom of a much larger problem of poverty and, as a result, our membership has evolved into a network of much more than traditional food banks.

In March of 2013, food banks in Ontario served **1, 206, 137** meals to thousands of hungry individuals and families. Behind each of these meals is a team of dedicated staff and volunteers. In fact, 40% of Ontario's food banks are run exclusively by volunteers. From packing client hampers, to preparing snacks for school breakfast programs, to stocking shelves, food bank workers are the lifeline of the provincial network of food banks. Out of this true commitment to ending hunger in Ontario, food bank workers have brainstormed, created, and implemented a plethora of programming that assists individuals as they lift themselves out of poverty.

Food Bank Profile



While **Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold** is primarily known as the Food Bank of St. Catharines and Thorold, the organization houses 16 accessible programs under one roof, making them so much more than just a food bank.

Community Care offers a comprehensive list of social services and programming that ranges from medical/dental/vision care, to clothing and household goods distribution, community gardens, and even income tax clinics.

A team of dedicated staff and volunteers welcomes food bank clients the moment they step inside the doors, with Savoury Samples – a creative idea that started as a way to encourage clients to try new and different types of foods. Through Savoury Samples, clients are offered tastings of a recipe that is both nutritious and easy to prepare utilizing food bank items, and is lovingly prepared by volunteers. The recipe and food items are then given to the client so that they may replicate the recipe at home.

Many food banks in Ontario offer additional programs and services that stretch beyond the traditional idea of a food bank. While emergency food relief is still incredibly important and necessary, food banks are becoming creative in their approach to tackling local hunger. For instance, community gardens provide many of our food banks with local, fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables that fill hampers and provide clients with the proper nutrition that they need to survive and thrive in day to day life. Other food banks offer resume writing sessions and career counselling that help clients as they search for jobs in their community.

On-site thrift stores provide some food banks with consistent revenue that ensures their shelves are stocked with healthy non-perishables, while also providing donated and affordable clothing options for members of their community.

No food bank is exactly alike, and the volume of compassionate programming and creative ideas that flow from our network is astounding. From community kitchens, to on-site dentists and public health nurses, to rental housing assistance, food banks are at the forefront of community engagement and innovation.

| Services offered | % |
|--|----|
| FOOD FOCUSED PROGRAMS | |
| Community Kitchen | 14 |
| Community Garden or Garden Plots | 17 |
| Low-cost produce (eg. Good Food Box) | 15 |
| Diet Specific Items | 20 |
| Holiday Hampers | 44 |
| Mobile hamper/ delivery of food | 15 |
| SKILL-BUILDING | |
| Nutrition Education | 30 |
| Training/ Education | 22 |
| Information about voting in elections | 13 |
| Budgeting/ Home economics | 24 |
| Community service information/ referrals | 51 |
| Assistance with Employment Search | 17 |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | |
| Programs for Pregnant women/ New moms | 12 |
| Emergency/ Preventative Health Care | 7 |
| Child Care/ Other Child-Youth Programs | 20 |
| Advocacy for Clients | 33 |
| Clothing/ Thrift Store | 34 |
| Low-cost/ Free Furniture | 23 |
| Rental Housing Lists | 19 |
| Emergency Shelter | 17 |

Food Bank Profile



The Gleaners Food Bank in Belleville is a community leader in hunger relief, and in environmental protection, with an extensive community garden and solar panel system that serves the people of Belleville well.

The Gleaners Organic Garden provides fresh produce to food bank clients, and is a community learning tool, acting as a teaching garden for schools and local groups. The garden itself is also completely off the grid – water is harvested from the food bank warehouse’s roof, and solar energy operates both the pump and lighting for the garden.

With a vision to create a form of sustainable income, the food bank installed 72 solar panels with help from grant funding. In partnership with Ice Bear Pilot and Veridian Connections, Gleaners also installed a new air conditioning system that has reduced costs by 60%, allowing for more funds to be allocated to food purchasing and operational costs. The Gleaners Food Bank’s mission is to feed community members in need, with sustainable methods.

Working towards a Hunger-Free Ontario

The Ontario Association of Food Banks’ mission is to strengthen communities in Ontario by providing food banks with food, resources, and solutions to address hunger. As a provincial network, food banks in Ontario agree that hunger is a symptom of the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Poverty is a pervasive issue that affects every corner of this province.

It is in the best interest of the Ontario government to take an active role in addressing the root causes of hunger, and understand why there are so many individuals and families going hungry in this province today. By implementing the following long-term, sustainable solutions, it is the Ontario Association of Food Bank’s belief that we can end hunger in this province:

- Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers and Food Producers
- Housing Benefit for Low-Income Tenants
- Access to Affordable, Nutritious Food
- Social Assistance Review

Food Bank Donation Tax Credit for Farmers and Food Producers

This fall, Ontario became the first province in Canada to pass a tax credit for the donation of agricultural product. As an amendment to Bill 36, the Local Food Act, farmers will be able to claim a 25% tax credit based on the fair market value of product donated to food banks and other charitable meal programs. This credit should be available to both farmers and food producers to ensure that all of Ontario's food industry receives compensation for their generosity.

An inclusive tax credit will encourage and stimulate donations that benefit both the local economy and the local food bank.

Housing Benefit for Low-Income Tenants

The cost of housing is a fixed expense and is non-negotiable. When families are struggling to make ends meet, and have to make a choice between paying the rent and putting food on the table, it is usually food that is sacrificed. The average food bank client spends 71% of their income on housing.⁵

An Ontario Housing Benefit would support the goals of a long-term, affordable housing and poverty reduction strategy by closing the gap between rent and income. This benefit would calculate rent based on household income, ensuring Ontarians are able to make ends meet while supporting themselves and their family.



Access to Affordable, Nutritious Food

Low income and poor health continue to be closely intertwined, affecting lower productivity, lower educational attainment, and a child's future income. For too many Ontarians, poor health is a major barrier to earning enough income to provide life's basics for themselves and their families. Without a liveable income, it is impossible to afford safe housing *and* nutritious food.

It is difficult to fully understand the challenges one faces when struggling to find a nourishing meal. There are so many dimensions to the growing issues of food costs, as food prices are expected to rise between 1.5% and 3.5% through 2013, while social assistance benefits remain stagnant. If the Government of Ontario created a comprehensive provincial food policy, Ontario would become a leader in food security.

Social Assistance Review

The downturn of the economy has forced many Ontarians into low-wage jobs without benefits that barely keep their families and themselves afloat. Those who are unable to find employment, or are unable to work, must rely on social assistance in order to survive. Both low-wage jobs and social assistance make it incredibly difficult for Ontarians to make ends meet.

It is imperative that the government takes immediate action to stop the widening of the income inequality gap by continuing to develop and improve upon the province's social safety net. Updates to social assistance, a focus on job training, and dedication to improving the economy of Ontario, will help balance out the inequalities of the province.



Moving Forward

Food banks started in Canada many years ago as what is often described as a "band-aid solution" to the growing issue of hunger. Food banks were supposed to be temporary, local groups that fed the poor, while the government developed the official resolution to this societal problem. Unfortunately, this resolution was never found, and food banks are now a staple in every corner of Canada.

In Ontario especially, we have seen the decline of high-paying, unionized, manufacturing jobs. Our post-secondary students are graduating with astronomical debts, and entering a work force with little to no room for them. New families that come to this country looking for better opportunities often have no other choice but to take low-paying jobs. The middle class is shrinking, while the divide between the rich and the poor continues to grow. Combine the troubles of the economy with rising costs in housing and food, as well as cuts to social assistance, and it is no wonder that more and more people are turning to food banks for some relief.

Food Bank Profile



The Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc. is committed to providing food bank clients with fresh, healthy and good quality produce. In order to meet the growing needs of their community, the food bank launched Plentiful Harvest - a comprehensive program that rescues large quantities of food from farmers, food producers, suppliers, restaurants, banquet halls, and grocery stores. Since the program started in 2012, the Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc. has rescued 1.7 million pounds of food that would have otherwise ended up in landfills.

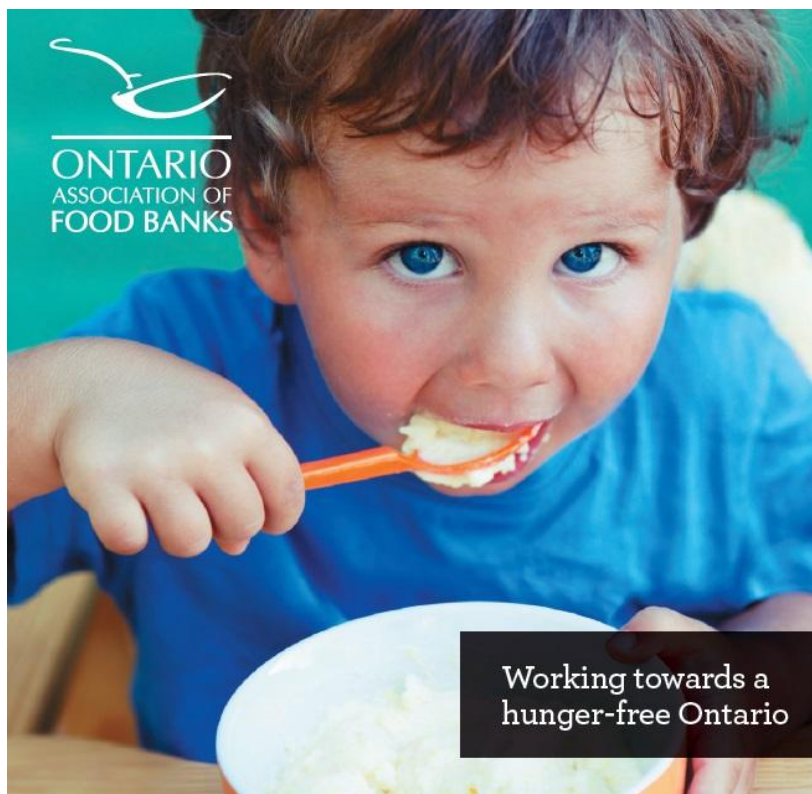
Two donated, refrigerated trucks not only pick up donations, but also act as mobile food banks that deliver fresh and prepared foods to neighbourhoods that lack access to a local food bank. The rest of the rescued food is brought back to the Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc.'s state of the art community kitchen. In collaboration with the Greater Essex County District School Board, the Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc. gives local students the opportunity to work in the community kitchen and learn practical job skills as they prepare soups, sauces, and other dishes with the rescued food. Food is also repackaged and preserved through canning, vacuum sealing, and dehydration, to extend the longevity and uses of the food donations.

The community kitchen also offers free cooking lessons, as well as workshops on money-saving shopping tips, how to read and understand nutritional facts on labels, and safe food handling and storage. The Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Inc.'s community kitchen brings individuals and families together, while breaking down social isolation and increasing knowledge on food preparation and nutrition.

As an association, these are issues that we consistently raise when we meet with MPPs and local politicians. Ontario needs an affordable housing strategy, as well as updates to social assistance. People need to be able to make a liveable wage.

Through local partnerships, advocacy efforts and hard work, food banks are struggling to be the voice of the thousands of people that they serve. Food banks will not go away until everyone is fed, clothed, and living a life of security. It is a bold statement, but the OAFB believes that we can end hunger.

As a province with so much, there is no reason that any child should have to go to bed hungry, or that any adult or senior should have to skip meals simply because they cannot afford it. Please support your local food banks, speak to your MPPs, and consider what might be possible if we all work together.

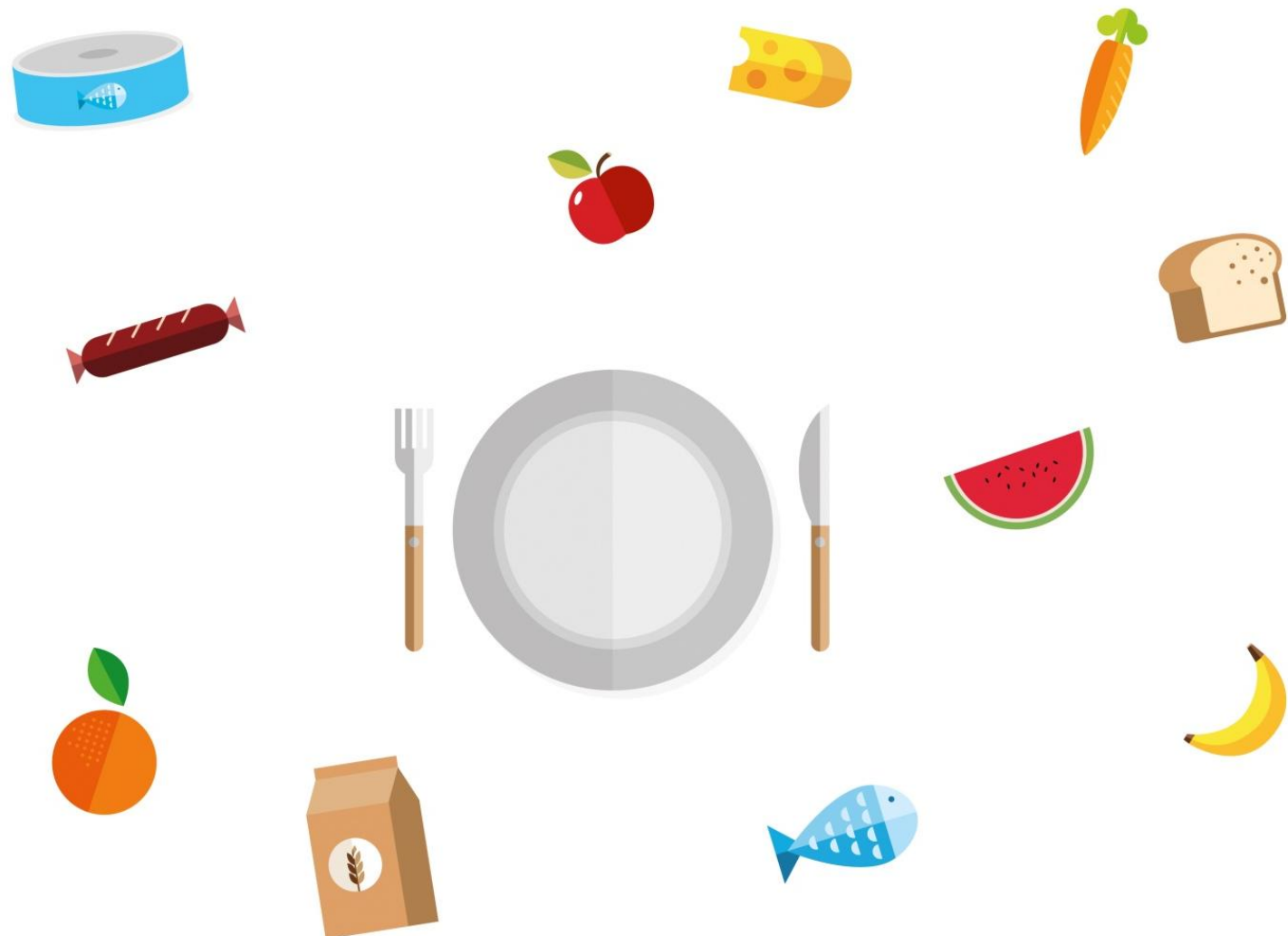


Thank you to all of our member food banks for all of your hard work in completing the 2013 March HungerCount survey, and for everything you do each day in providing support to your community and those in need.

Acton - Acton Food Share
Ailsa Craig - Ailsa Craig & Area Food Bank
Alexandria - St. Vincent-de-Paul Food Bank
Alliston - The Good Shepherd Food Bank
Bancroft - North Hastings Community Cupboard
Barrie - Barrie Food Bank
Barry's Bay - Madawaska Valley Food Bank
Beamsville - Community Care of West Niagara
Belleville - Quinte Region Food Share Shelter (QRFSS)
Blenheim - Blenheim Food Bank
Blind River - Blind River Emergency Food Bank Inc.
Bobcaygeon - Bobcaygeon Food Bank
Bonfield - Bonfield Family Life Centre
Bracebridge - Manna Food Bank
Brampton - Salvation Army Food Bank
Brantford - Community Resource Service
Brockville - Operation Harvest Sharing
Burk's Falls - Burk's Falls & District Food Bank
Burlington - Partnership West Family Support Network
Caledon (Bolton) - Caledon Community Services
Caledonia - Caledonia & District Food Bank
Cambridge - Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank
Campbellford - Campbellford Warkworth Fare Share Food Bank
Cardiff - Cardiff Community Food Bank
Carleton Place - Lanark County Food Bank
Chatham - Chatham Outreach for Hunger
Cobalt - Cobalt, Coleman, Latchford & Area Food Bank
Cobourg - Food 4 All Northumberland
Cobourg - Northumberland Fare Share Food Bank
Cochrane - Cochrane Food Bank Inc.
Collingwood - The Salvation Army Food Bank
Commanda - Argyle District Food Bank
Cornwall - Centre Agape Centre
Deep River - Deep River Food Bank
Dryden - Dryden Food Bank
Dunnville - Salvation Army Family Services
Durham - Durham & District Food Bank
Eganville - Eganville & District Community Food Bank
Elliot Lake - Elliot Lake Emergency Food Bank
Embrun - Good Neighbours Food Bank
Erin - East Wellington Community Services
Fergus - Centre Wellington Food Bank
Fonthill - Pelham Cares
Fort Erie - Community Outreach
Gananoque - Gananoque & District Food Bank
Georgetown - Georgetown Bread Basket
Goderich - St. Vincent de Paul
Grimsby - Grimsby Benevolent Fund Food Bank
Guelph - Guelph Food Bank
Hamilton - Hamilton Food Share
Hanover - The Salvation Army
Hastings - Hastings & Roseneath Ministerial Food Bank
Havelock - Havelock & Community Food Bank
Ingersoll - The Salvation Army Ingersoll
Jarvis - Jarvis Caring Cupboard
Kanata - Kanata Food Cupboard
Kingston - Partners in Mission Food Bank
Kitchener - The Food Bank of Waterloo Region
L'Original - Banque Alimentaire de L'Original
Lake St. Peter - Word of Life Outreach
Lanark - Lanark Highlands Food Pantry
Lindsay - Kawartha Lakes Food Source
Listowel - The Salvation Army Community & Family Services
London - London and Area Food Bank
Meaford - Golden Town Outreach
Midland - Salvation Army Midland Community Church
Minden - The Minden Food Bank
Mississauga - The Mississauga Food Bank
New Liskeard - The Salvation Army
Newcastle - Clarington East Food Bank
Niagara Falls - Project S.H.A.R.E
North Bay - North Bay Food Bank
Norwich - The Salvation Army Family Services & Food Bank
Norwood - Norwood and District Ministerial Food Bank
Oakville - Food For Life: ReFresh Foods
Orangeville - Orangeville Food Bank
Orillia - The Sharing Place
Oshawa - Feed the Need in Durham
Ottawa - Ottawa Food Bank
Owen Sound - Salvation Army Owen Sound
Palmerston - Palmerston Food Bank
Paris - Salvation Army Community & Family Services
Parry Sound - Harvest Share Community Food Bank
Perth - Perth & District Food Bank
Peterborough - Kawartha Food Share
Port Colborne - Port Cares Reach Out Food Centre
Port Dover - Port Dover and Area Life Line Food Bank
Port Elgin - Salvation Army Community & Family Services
Port Hope - Northumberland Fare Share Food Bank
Port Rowan - Port Rowan Mission Food Bank
Powassan - Powassan & District Food Bank
Prescott - Food For All Food Bank
Richmond Hill - LifeCorps
Ridgetown - Ridgetown Salvation Army Family Services
Rodney - Rodney Caring Cupboard
Sarnia - Inn of the Good Shepherd
Sault Ste. Marie - The Salvation Army Community & Family Services
Simcoe - Simcoe Caring Cupboard
Smiths Falls Community Food Bank
Smithville - West Lincoln Community Care
South River - Good Happenings Food Bank
St. Catharines - Community Care St. Catharines & Thorold
St. Thomas - The Caring Cupboard
Stratford - Stratford House of Blessing
Sudbury - Banque D'Aliments Sudbury Food Bank
Sunderland - Brock Community Food Bank
Thunder Bay - Regional Food Distribution Association
Tichborne - North Frontenac Food Bank
Tillsonburg - Helping Hand Food Bank
Toronto (North York) - North York Harvest Food Bank
Toronto - Daily Bread Food Bank
Trenton - Trenton Care and Share Food Bank
Uxbridge - Uxbridge Loaves and Fishes Food Bank
Walkerton - Walkerton & District Food Bank
Wallaceburg - Wallaceburg Salvation Army Family Services
Warkworth - 7 Hills Community Food Pantry
Wasaga Beach - Wasaga Beach Ministerial Food Bank
Waterdown - Food with Grace Waterdown Food Bank
Welland - The Hope Centre
Warton - The Salvation Army
Winchester - Dundas County Food Bank
Windsor - Windsor & Essex County Food Bank Association
Wingham - North Huron Community Food Share
Woodstock - The Salvation Army
Zurich - Blessings Community Store & Food Bank

References

- ¹ http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/09/02/ontario_welfare_reforms_roll_out_this_month.html
- ² <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/canadians-trimming-food-budgets-in-face-of-higher-prices-rbc-says-1.1331494>
- ³ <http://cfs-fcee.ca/>
- ⁴ http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/statcan/11-626-x/11-626-x2013027-eng.pdf
- ⁵ <http://www.dailybread.ca/learning-centre/housing-benefit/>





ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION OF
FOOD BANKS

For more information or to find your local food
bank, please visit www.oafb.ca

Hunger Report 2013 was written by Amanda King and Erin Fotheringham, and designed by Amanda King and Carolyn Stewart. Special Thank You to **Pilot PMR** for creating the report's graphics and corresponding, online infographic.

© Ontario Association of Food Banks, November 2013

Ontario Association of Food Banks
555 Richmond Street West, Suite 501, PO Box 1108
Toronto, ON, M5V 3B1

Charitable Registration Number: 88526 0968 RR0001