

The Good Food Box Program

Celebrating Ten Years in Quinte



Program Description:

Smart Shoppers pay \$20.00 by the first day of every month to coordinators located throughout Hastings County. This is similar to purchasing a “share” in the next month’s box as this money is used to negotiate the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables with local growers and grocers. This results in significant savings to Smart Shoppers as they pay a fraction of the price they’d pay if purchasing retail.

Boxes are packed at our central warehouse located in Belleville and are picked up the third Thursday of every month at one of many depots located throughout the region.

The contents of the box changes each month depending upon:

- The season
- The number of people participating
- The price of goods.

This is because foods are generally cheaper when purchased from local growers when in season. We also negotiate with local grocers to purchase in bulk. These volume discounts help us to maximize our collective purchasing power resulting in increased savings to our customers, helping families to stretch their food dollar reduce their food costs and meet the food needs of their family members.

How we started: The Community Development Council of Quinte released a Task Force on Hunger report: Hungry For Action in 1991. That report identified that one in ten people were at risk of experiencing hunger in our City.

The follow up work to the Task Force on Hunger resulted in significant community discussion about the importance of implementing food security strategies that helped individuals and families become self-sufficient and maintain their dignity and pride in accessing community food programs. We were clearly told that a self-help approach to food security was preferable to traditional “charitable” food models.

In the fall of 2004, the CDC sponsored an open forum on the self-help food strategies. A Steering Committee comprised of forum participants, individuals who could benefit by having access to healthy, nutritious foods, was established and The Good Food Box Program was borne. It is modeled on the Field To Table’s Good Food Box Program and was the third such program in Ontario (behind Toronto and Niagara).

Several weeks later, the committee sponsored a meeting with the assistance of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs with two dozen growers. The growers were less enthusiastic and only a handful signed on to become growing partners.

In October 2005, the first Good Food Boxes rolled off the CDC assembly line. That month volunteers packed 40 boxes in the gymnasium of a local school. Within one month the number of boxes had tripled. At its peak, 400 boxes were being packed each and every month. The box cost \$15.00 then.

Over the years, and as a result of our association with the Ontario Good Food Box Network, led by Food Share, it became clear that Good Food Box Programs that had centralized support were more likely to be successful than those staffed strictly by volunteers.

Good Food Box participants decided that while fresh fruits and vegetables were important, especially in light of the fact that household money tends to be shortest supply during the third week of the month, that the same program could be replicated to provide healthy breakfast, lunch, and snack items. One of the participants submitted a proposal to for funding to lead the planning process. She

was hired in December of 2007 to coordinate the Good Lunch Box Program. The Good Lunch Box Program operated similarly to its sister program but contained strictly the non-perishable staples needed to help families provide for the food needs of their family members. The Good Lunch Box was packed the second Thursday of the month.

At the same time, while the cube van used to transport the good throughout the region had previously been donated to the organization, from 2000 onward, the CDC was required to pay a rental fee for the use of the larger truck necessary to accommodate our growing program needs. When gas prices also increased the administrative costs associated with program delivery also increased.

The Good Lunch Box program was discontinued in May of 2005 when we could no longer guarantee significant savings to Smart Shoppers. Instead, elements of the Good Lunch Box program were rolled into the Existing Good Food Box Program.

The (New) Good Food Box now the fresh fruits and vegetables for which it was known but also contained standard staples (bread, pasta, rice, canned goods). The new box cost \$20.00

To compliment this program, a sister program was designed to meet the needs of one and two person families. Entitled: The Singles Box, the box contained fruits and vegetable suitable for small families. This program cost \$10.00 each and operates on the same day as the Good Food Box. This has substantially reduced the administrative costs associated with the program and has, in fact, increased our purchasing power through volume buying.

Below lists the contents of both boxes for the month of August 2005

Good Food Box	Singles Box
Potatoes (10 lbs)	Potatoes (5 lbs)
Carrots (1 1/2 lbs.)	Carrots (1lbs.)
Applies (3 lbs.)	Apples (2lbs)
Onions (3 lbs.)	Onions - 2-3
Bananas (2 lbs.)	Banana (1 1/2 lbs.)
Corn Flakes	Cantaloupe
1 package of 8 Bagels	2 Lemons
Margarine	Broccoli
1 Popcorn	6 Corn
Allen's Apple Juice	Iceberg Lettuce
Peaches (3 lbs)	Celery
Unico Pasta Sauce	2 Red Onion
No Name Jello	Green Beans (1/4 lbs)
1 Large Cantaloupe	2 Tomatoes
1 Large Broccoli	Garlic
No Name Pasta	Garden Herbs
Frozen Lemonade	
1 doz. Corn	
6 Tomatoes	
Green Pepper	
2 Field Cucumbers	
1 Med. Cabbage	
Fresh Basil	

Our Successes:

Partnerships:

Cultivating relationships with local partners helped to ensure this program's success. Specifically, the local Health Unit provides helpful, healthy hints in each month's box for Smart Shoppers. These helpful hints are geared toward maximizing the value of the box, supporting Smart Shoppers in meeting the needs of their family members, and have been assessed by program participants as contributing to the program's strengths.

Local Depots:

Coordinators have traditionally been volunteers who are committed to the program. But, coordinators come and go depending up life circumstances. For that reason, central depots in each community has helped to provide program delivery consistency. Local health centers, daycares, schools, drop in centers, and faith communities all serve as depots within their community. Most are already staffed and coordinate at their end on behalf of their constituency.

Coordinator's Incentives:

Coordinators that order ten or more boxes are entitled to one free box. This, along with periodic "freebies", such as circus tickets, tickets to hockey games, etc. have strengthened the volunteer pool and have served as an important reminder to volunteers that their contribution is valued.

Values:

These programs are value based. They demonstrate our community development values (that all people can benefit by working together, that every individual has skills, experience, and wisdom to share, and that all individuals have value and worth.) These programs further support the local economy and attain their objectives through community collaboration.

Our Challenges:

Warehouse:

Prior to 1999 the CDC received only project funding to provide coordination for this initiative. During that time the packing locations changed frequently. In 1999, the CDC acquired a central warehouse from which all food is now received, packed, and transported.

Coordination:

As per above, staff resources were fairly limited prior to 1999. By combining coordination of this program with funding proposals to implement a larger food security strategy, the CDC was able to overcome this challenge by hiring sufficient staff to enable the program throughout the region.

Charitable Food Sector:

The charitable food sector has not embraced the program, its concept or methods. At one point the CDC was “accused” of “stealing food bank clients away from food banks.” While indeed this is true since we believe individuals deserve to have their food needs met through respectful means, the politics of turfism occasionally impacts our ability to generate additional supports for the program. The Charitable Sector has seen itself as “owning” issues of food security resulting in a lack of continuum of supports for individuals with food security needs.

Provincial/National Coalitions:

While Food Share once focused on creating/supporting a Food Box network on which members could glean insight, share tools, resources, and experiences, coalitions no longer exist through any formal structure. Consequently, “Food Box Programs” are developed that do not necessarily subscribe to a clear set of values and guidelines resulting in such activities as “means testing” for program participants.

That said, those of us that have enjoyed success with the program have not sought out financial supports to scale up our knowledge and expertise for those who might benefit by such, despite our responsibility to do so.