



Difficult Economic Climate Increases Stress on Canadian Food Banks

Food Banks Canada asking Canadians and Government to take action to help on National Hunger Awareness Day (June 2)

TORONTO - June 1, 2009 – Food Banks Canada is reporting an approximately 20 per cent increase in the number of Canadians turning to food banks and, as a result, food banks across the country are facing unprecedented challenges providing essential food to those in need. On National Hunger Awareness Day (June 2), Food Banks Canada is calling on Canadians to donate funds, food or time to ensure Canadian food banks can continue to meet the needs of Canada's hungry during this difficult economic time.

“Each month, hundreds of thousands of Canadians are facing very difficult choices – do they pay the rent, pay the hydro bill, or buy food,” says Katharine Schmidt, Executive Director, Food Banks Canada. “We want Canadians to know that families and individuals in their own communities are turning to food banks, in increasing numbers.”

This approximately 20 per cent increase is based on initial survey results on food bank usage in March of this year compared to March 2008. Some regions across the country are seeing an even greater demand. In Penticton, British Columbia, the food bank has experienced a 37 per cent increase in food bank usage since last year, with much of the increase attributed to recent layoffs. In North Bay, Ontario, the local food bank is in a similar situation, in part because of job losses in the mining sector. Further details on national food bank usage will be released by Food Banks Canada once all research is completed.

In 2008, more than 700,000 Canadians, including students, seniors, people with disabilities, and adults with jobs who don't make enough to support their families - turned to food banks in an average month.* Now, more than ever, communities across the country are in need of assistance, and both individuals and governments can help those in need.

Canadians Can Make a Difference

Food Banks Canada is urging all Canadians, who are able, to make a positive choice to donate food and funds, volunteer at a local food bank or sign a petition to encourage government action, available online at www.hungerawarenessday.ca.

Federal Government Action Needed Now

Food Banks Canada is calling on the Federal Government to take additional action to reduce the need for food banks.

In the short term, it recommends the Federal Government:

- Create one eligibility level for Employment Insurance for all of Canada and extend benefits to 52 weeks
- Increase the value of the Canada Child Tax Benefit from approximately \$3,300 to \$5,000 per child, per year
- Increase federal funding allocated to housing repair and improvement in rural areas
- Provide increased and ongoing support to a system of early learning and child care that is affordable, inclusive and of high quality

Along with these short term recommendations, Food Banks Canada also supports the creation of a federal strategy to reduce poverty and hunger in the long term.

Background on National Hunger Awareness Day

National Hunger Awareness Day was created to provide food banks with an opportunity to educate about the reality of hunger in Canada and to encourage all Canadians to make a choice to help those in need. Although the first food bank was opened in 1981 as a temporary emergency measure, food banks have become an important part of the social safety net. Today, 707 food banks and 3,078 affiliated agencies distribute food or provide meals for hungry Canadians.

Food Banks Canada Corporate Hunger Heroes

National Hunger Awareness Day would not be possible without the support of some of Canada's leading corporate citizens. Food Banks Canada would like to thank this year's Corporate Hunger Heroes who are vital to raising awareness for the cause. These Heroes include, Campbell Company of Canada, Great West Life, Investors Group Inc., Kraft Canada Inc., McCain Foods (Canada), Nestlé Canada Inc., Purolator Courier Ltd. and Sodexo.

About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization representing the food bank community across Canada. Our members and their respective agencies serve approximately 85 per cent of people accessing emergency food programs nationwide. Our mission is to meet the short term need for food and find long-term solutions to reduce hunger. Visit www.foodbankscanada.ca for more information.

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** Source: HungerCount2008, Food Banks Canada. For the complete 2008 HungerCount report please go to: http://foodbankscanada.ca/documents/HungerCount_en_fin.pdf*

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