

# Hamilton's hunger hard to drive away *Oct 18, 2010*

But volunteers fight back by picking carrots near Troy

BY JOHN BURMAN

Hamilton is getting hungrier and Food Share struggles to fill the shelves.

"It's worse," Joanne Santucci says bluntly of the city's hunger Saturday - World Food Day, as a matter of fact.

"Last year was the worst ever," she adds, rhyming off the all-too-familiar list of causes: the recession, the economy, the loss of food producers who used to donate their overages, and producers being forced to be more efficient and not have over runs in the first place.

The Hamilton Hunger Count shows a small decrease in food use, over the year, down from 19,602 people in March 2009 to 18,500 this year and probably due to recovery in the economy. But that decrease did not take food bank use down to levels prior to the recession.

The number of households accessing food banks actually rose over the year, from 7,685 in March 2009 to 8,507 in the same month this year.

Every time use goes up, Santucci says, it doesn't return to its previous level.

It continues to creep up with each cycle.

"We must look for new sources, better structures, better service and better information on use..."

But Santucci is smiling, beaming in fact.

Hamilton Food Share is partici-



**They're working hard in the fields as Hamilton Food Share partners with City of Hamilton Community Services staff to reduce hunger on World Food Day by harvesting carrots at a West Flamborough farm Saturday.**

pating in a subtle, not so obvious but strategic shift in its supply sourcing - which has local farmers growing nutritious food for local tables.

Helping Hamilton community services' general manager JoAnne Priel wrangled 60 volunteers to pick carrots in a field north of Troy Saturday morning.

Alvaro Venturelli, owner Plan B Organic Farms on Concession 4 west of Highway 8 dedicated 27 acres to produce potatoes, onions and carrots for Hamilton Food share this year.

Venturelli, who grows organic produce, says the land was available because the soil needs three growing seasons to recover its status for organic farming after regular crop cycles using chemical fertilizers.

Other local growers have contributed green beans, peppers, squash, zucchini, lettuce, corn and tomatoes to Food Share, following a pilot project set up by the Ontario Association of Food Banks. Hamilton's project is one of four similar pilots running in the province. The Ontario Association gets the food

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at cost.

So far, the Hamilton pilot project has delivered more than 11,339 kilograms of fresh food.

The idea is to bring more stability to stocking food bank shelves by being proactive, a significant shift way from relying solely on incidental donations to production sourcing. Hamilton Food Share is also looking into greenhouse production as well.

It was fitting that World Food Day was 'harvest day' for the carrots heading for Hamilton Food Share.



**A bumper crop of carrots is ready for the city's hungry.**

That's why Priel and volunteers from the city's community services department were out to pull carrots.

Priel says the harvest was the first move in a new city corporate responsibility program to encourage volunteerism among staff and it was a success.

"I have an incredible staff," said Priel, watching the volunteers begin warmup exercises, admire each other's rubber boots and then settle down to work.

Community service staff provide programs for Hamilton's most vulnerable, she said and the day of service, such as the harvest, is a chance to contribute to the community on a more personal level.

"I believe this day can be the first of many."

*jburman@thespec.com*  
905-526-2469