



March 31, 2020

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
M7A 1A1
premier@ontario.ca

Dear Premier Ford,

We are grateful for the many efforts that the Government of Ontario has taken to keep the citizens of this province healthy during the Covid-19 crisis. However, the Government's decision to close outdoor community gardens may put the health of citizens at further risk. I am writing to ask you to please immediately remove outdoor community gardens from the list of closures for recreation activities and place them on the list of essential food services in Ontario.

Thousands of families across Ontario rely on community gardens to produce food for their families each year. In Durham Region alone we have a conservative accounting of 4000 people depending on community gardens to supplement their food during the growing season. There has been a major increase in demand for this service since the beginning of Covid-19. Furthermore, the virus' arrival has halted citizen development of new gardens that could absorb growing wait lists until 2021. People throughout the province have already invested in their seeds and started seedlings for their community garden plots this growing season.

Many of the gardens in the Region of Durham and its municipalities are located in or near areas identified as low-income priority neighbourhoods by the Durham Region Health Department. In addition, many of our gardens' community members live in apartment buildings or homes where they have restricted ability to grow their own food. Low-income households and those who rent are both at increased risk of food insecurity.¹

In response to local food insecurity, several gardens in Durham designate large portions of land toward providing fresh produce to agencies and food banks that serve our most vulnerable, up to 10,000 pounds from one garden alone. All gardens in Durham reserve some land for this. Food banks in communities all around Ontario receive tons of fresh produce from local community garden efforts. This model of community food production is seen as integral to the Covid-19 response in countries throughout the world, particularly as food prices increase and global food supplies are increasingly uncertain.

We take community safety very seriously and we are already scheduled to participate in the Ontario Community Gardening Network meeting this coming Monday April 6 at 12 pm to 1:30 pm. Durham

Integrated Growers for a Sustainable Community (DIG) has developed best practices / recommendations for gardens in Durham Region during Covid-19 and has shared these documents with the meeting organizers as part of this province-wide discussion to develop requirements for community gardening during Covid-19 times.

Please take immediate action to clarify for everyone in Ontario that community gardening is an essential food service.

With sincere thanks,



Mary Drummond

President, Durham Integrated Growers for a Sustainable Community
Chair, Durham Food Policy Council

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cc: Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Member of Provincial Parliament
Mr. Lorne Coe, Member of Provincial Parliament
Ms. Jennifer K. French, Member of Provincial Parliament
Ms. Lindsey Park, Member of Provincial Parliament
Hon. Rod Phillips, Member of Provincial Parliament
Hon. Laurie Scott, Member of Provincial Parliament
Mr. David Piccini, Member of Provincial Parliament
Mayor Dan Carter, City of Oshawa
Mayor Dave Ryan, City of Pickering
Mayor Adrian Foster, Municipality of Clarington
Mayor Shaun Collier, Town of Ajax
Mayor Don Mitchell, Town of Whitby
Mayor Debbie Bath-Hadden, Township of Brock
Mayor Bobbie Drew, Township of Scugog
Mayor Dave Barton, Township of Uxbridge

ⁱ Tarasuk, V. (2020). Webinar on Food Insecurity: 2017-2018 Report from PROOF.