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SOU'WESTER

Wayne Hiltz from the Chicken

Producers of Manitoba and Keren

Taylor Hughes from Winnipeg Harvest  
move chicken into a freezer on April

### Winner, winner, chicken dinner

## MANITOBA CHICKEN DONATES TO WINNIPEG HARVEST

By: Susie Strachan

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A plan to donate frozen chickens to Winnipeg Harvest had been in the works at Manitoba Chicken Producers for over a year; but it was bumped up in a hurry in April. Manitoba Chicken Producers (MCP) was working with chicken farmers and two local processing plants to donate 1,000 chickens a week starting in July, according to Wayne Hiltz, the organization's executive director.

"That was the first stage we'd been planning for the past year," he said. "But in April, Winnipeg Harvest phoned to say donations were down and needs were up. So we delivered 3,000 processed chickens to them to help them through the crisis."

MCP, located at 1357 Kenaston Blvd. in the Tuxedo Industrial Park, is working with industry partners Dunn-Rite Food Products and Exceldor Cooperative, along with farm families on the Caring for Communities program as a long-term commitment to stabilize Winnipeg Harvest's animal protein needs.

"On an annual basis, it would cost us around \$420,000 for the donation of 1,000 chickens per week, which is the wholesale price, based on 2019 prices," Hiltz said.

Wayne Hiltz from the Chicken Producers of Manitoba and Keren Taylor Hughes from Winnipeg Harvest move chicken into a freezer on April 23.

"Half of that price is taken up by the chicken producers and half by the processors.

We're humbled and proud they have committed to making this donation." Approximately 60 per cent of the 123 chicken producers in Manitoba are participating in the upcoming donation, Hiltz said.

"At Harvest, donations of meat and poultry are scarce and expensive to buy," Keren Taylor-Hughes, Winnipeg Harvest chief executive officer, said in a news release. "This partnership will help to ensure we can provide a lean and nutritious protein source to our clients, helping to further nourish our communities."

The two chicken processing plants had time to develop contingency plans to deal with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic before it arrived in Manitoba, according to Hiltz, which means the plants are able to keep up with demand.

"Processing plants in B.C., Ontario and Quebec were hit first, so the local plants were able to make early plans to protect workers," he said. "They put up barriers between workstations. Exceldor took its turkey floor and turned it into a bigger lunch room for the workers."

In fact, he said, both Dunn-Rite and Exceldor are reporting below average absenteeism, as employees feel safer and are committed to keeping the food supply chain moving. Dunn-Rite's processing plant is located in Fort Richmond, with its hatchery in Grunthal, Man. Exceldor — better known by its Granny's Chicken label — has its head office in Transcona and its processing plant in Blumenort, Man.

The donations made to Winnipeg Harvest are whole, frozen chickens, which gives the food bank options. They can deliver whole birds to other food banks, soup kitchens or individual clients, or they can cut the chickens into parts.

"We've provided Harvest with two information cards to hand out with the birds. The first is on how to safely handle a chicken, including how to properly thaw a frozen bird. The second is on how to properly cook a whole chicken," Hiltz said.

Susie Strachan

Canstar, Susie Strachan is the community journalist for The Sou'wester.