

Manitoba chickens come home via food bank program



Going the Extra Mile By: [Eva Wasney](#)

Posted: 6:17 PM CDT Thursday, Apr. 23, 2020



Wayne Hiltz, executive director of Manitoba Chicken Producers, at Winnipeg Harvest with a shipment of chickens Thursday.

Manitoba chicken farmers and processors have partnered to provide Winnipeg Harvest with much-needed protein.

The food bank is set to receive 1,000 chickens a week beginning in July. The initiative organized by Manitoba Chicken Producers made an early donation of 3,000 chickens Thursday to help meet demand created by the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact.

"Now to the end of April, we will probably have seen on average a 30 per cent increase of food bank use across the province," said Winnipeg Harvest chief executive officer Keren Taylor-Hughes.

Harvest typically serves about 70,000 people, 25 per cent of whom are children, each month between its more than 300 rural and urban food bank locations. That

number has climbed closer 90,000 during the pandemic, as more Manitobans grapple with a loss of income.

The non-profit struggled with supply chain interruptions early in March, but has had donations from retailers pick back up recently. Being able to add chicken to hampers provides extra nutrition and variety for clients, said Taylor-Hughes.

"Traditionally, we don't have a lot of meat-based protein to provide other than what comes in a can, like tuna," she said, explaining because meat is a coveted and costly grocery item it doesn't often make it to the food bank.

"Now, we're providing really healthy options for our families and that makes a huge difference."

When Manitoba Chicken Producers learned about the protein shortfall, the industry organization saw an opportunity to help.

"We're able to provide a nice stable supply to Winnipeg Harvest, so they know what they can budget on," said executive director Wayne Hiltz. "It's going to make a big difference to a lot of people's lives — and that's the important part."

The project has been a year in the making and the annual donation of 52,000 processed birds carries a monetary value of more than \$420,000. Sixty per cent of the province's 123 chicken producers have signed up to donate and companies Dunn-Rite Food Products and Exceldor Co-operative will be processing and delivering the birds to Harvest for free on a weekly rotation.

The food bank intends to provide a whole, frozen chicken to every client on a rotating basis, meaning families and individuals will receive a chicken in their hamper several times a year.

Taylor-Hughes is grateful to the producers and processing companies who have decided to forego profit to help feed vulnerable communities.

"It's truly amazing," she said. "They are doing such a tremendous thing for Manitobans and for us at Harvest, we can't even quantify that kind of commitment."

www.winnipegfreepress.com