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SOCIAL ISSUES: Development, provincial government to blame for food shortage, forum hears

# Region's hunger will grow, forum told

BY LISA QUEEN  
STAFF WRITER

A Mercedes car dealership now stands where Markham's longtime community garden used to grow vegetables for the town's hungry and others wanting fresh produce.

It may be an insignificant link in the overall food chain, but it's also symbolic of how "food security" is tied to money, according to York Region's first-ever forum on hunger, held last week.

Debbie Fields, a spokesperson with Toronto's Food Share, said it's unconscionable that income levels can deter-

mine whether or not people go hungry in a province as prosperous as Ontario and an area as wealthy as York Region.

Until food is taken out of the general marketplace and given universally to all who need it — like we do with health care or education — Fields believes hunger and malnutrition will continue to grow.

**'We are uninvesting in people's long-term health. We are cutting money out of people's pocket so they will be long-term unhealthy.'**

"We have a situation where food is part of the marketplace and we see it as a commodity like shoes or any other commodity. And I would argue that is the core of our food insecurity problem," she said. "It shames us as a rich province."

Fields said hunger and poverty have been allowed to continue because our society has been divided into the "haves" and "have nots."

While "we" deserve basics like food and shelter, "they" have brought poverty and hunger on themselves and deserve everything they get.

But Fields said people have to be taught the benefits of ensuring everyone has enough nutritious food.

She pointed out that, a century ago, society thought it was natural that only people with money deserved medical care. But most Canadians now believe health care should be universally available, regardless of income.

"We understand that but we don't understand the same thing about food," she said. "Hunger should be as stupid in a land of plenty as women dying in child birth."

Fields said hunger is creating a health care "disaster."

"We are uninvesting in people's long-term health. We are cutting money out of people's pocket so they will be long-term unhealthy."

She urged the forum participants to make food security a more acceptable political issue.

"If it's about poor kids, it's actually about a minority of kids and then it's therefore not politically of interest to all of you as parents. And we have to change this. We have to make it an issue that's an issue for parents, regardless of income," she said.

"When you think about (hunger), particularly if it does help you, think about that senior who might be your mother, who might be you. Think about the fact it isn't someone else."

Fields said Premier Mike Harris got away with cutting social assistance benefits by 21.6 per cent three years ago because the general public believed he was finally dealing with people who had sponged off the sys-

tem for years, or even generations.

But she said the public is now discovering what happens if people don't stand up for each other.

"They came for people on social assistance and people didn't do anything. And they came for the hospitals and they came for the unions and people didn't do much," Fields said.


"Now, they're coming for the schools. A lot of us think that is finally the way in which people will wake up and see this doesn't make sense. Good schools cost money, as good hospitals do. We can't deliver the quality of the society we want unless we pay."

**'When you think hunger, think about that senior who might be your mother. Think about the fact it isn't someone else.'**

Fields warned that Ontario, one of the richest societies in the world, is systematically making itself food insecure.

She pointed to York Region, where rapid development is eating up some of the most valuable farmland in the country.

"We're going to look back and say 'How did we let all these cities be built on that farmland?' If we can't grow food in Canada in the 21st century, we're dependent on the world market."



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**Dr. James MacLean**

**Markham Stouffville Hospital**

The Board of Directors of Markham Stouffville Hospital has announced the appointment of Dr. James MacLean, the Hospital's Chief of Staff, as interim President & CEO, effective November 6, 1998.

The announcement comes after the Board of Directors accepted the resignation of hospital President & CEO, Elizabeth Woodbury.

Dr. MacLean has been the hospital's Chief of Staff and a member of executive since the hospital's opening in 1990. Dr. MacLean will continue his active Markham-based family practice during his interim position as President & CEO.

The Board of Directors thanks Ms. Woodbury for the contribution she has made to the hospital during her tenure.

The Board of Directors and Hospital Management Team will continue to ensure that quality care and services are provided to patients and the residents of Stouffville, Markham, and surrounding communities.

**David Graham**  
Chair  
Board of Directors