

Unpacking a Harvest hamper



One of the things I have always wondered was 'What's in a Harvest hamper?' so I got one, and I'm writing about it.

There are four boxes or bags that make up the Harvest hamper. Three of them have labels: perishables, non-perishables, and baby kit. The fourth has no label but it's full of fresh and frozen items as donated, such as chicken, eggs and bread.

In the first instalment of these columns, we'll look at the perishable items in a Harvest hamper.

This is NOT Hello Fresh

I have three immediate impressions:

- 1) This looks like a lot of food.
- 2) It's two weeks-worth of food support to stretch over a month to feed a family of four.
- 3) There's one loaf of bread. Surveying the contents, I quickly realize you'd have to be a kitchen magician to stretch a loaf of bread

and everything else across a month of salads, pasta dishes, stir fries, soups, sandwiches and snacks.

Precious perishables

The perishables box includes two litres of milk for every child under 12, one dozen eggs, one 900-gram/25-slice loaf of bread, two avocados, six lemons, two limes, one package of ripe/red cherry tomatoes, a tub of baby spinach, a bag of mini (two-inch) red and orange peppers, a bag of mini carrots, two crowns of broccoli, a two-pound bag of onions, a tub of veggie dip, 19 potatoes and a three-pound bag of apples.

The most significant inclusions in my hamper were a four-kilogram box of frozen chicken legs with thighs attached. The band on this box said Granny's but on another day it could have been Dunn-Rite or Exceldor because, as members of the Manitoba Chicken Producers, these farm families and producers are major contributors to Harvest. Finally, there are five softball-sized frozen, sliced hams. These will have a place on the plate for breakfast, lunch or dinner.



Supplied photo

Harvest hamper contents vary depending on what food is donated. Almost 11 million pounds of food is donated per year. Pictured are the fresh foods in the hamper reviewed in this column.

One special item

Sitting in the unlabelled box or bag, along with a lot of boxed, canned goods from the Harvest Top 10 most-needed items list, is a delicious looking, fresh-made apple crumble pie from one of the local grocery stores. Kids would be wide-eyed to see this and even happier to eat it. For a family needing food just to get by, I figure this contains about 3,000 emotional calories. I smile at the thought.

The 'local' grocery store that made and donated the pie is a part of a national chain. I didn't mention its name because all the major grocery stores, local and national, are huge supporters of Harvest. So please, whenever you grocery shop, know you are walking the aisles of a 'House of Harvest.'

Missing ingredients

And then I realize there's a bunch of other stuff that's not here.

In terms of perishables, there's no butter, margarine, flour, spices, ketchup, or mustard. There's salad fixings but no dressing or olive oil and garlic to make your own. You've got the basics, but you don't have everything.

Stars in the Harvest hampers

As I survey the fruit and veggies here, I can picture moms and dads with a hungry family to feed, unpacking a Harvest hamper with smiles on their faces and feelings of relief in their hearts. For their kids, even the anticipation of that pie is enough to inspire genuine happiness. None of that emotional nutrition is listed on any of the labels in this hamper. But it's important, and it's in there.



Supplied photo

Even though there were some blemishes, the potatoes were very firm and wholesome.

More to come

Thanks for reading this. In future articles, we'll finish exploring the non-perishable and baby kit components of a Harvest hamper.

One in seven Manitobans lives in a food insecure household, meaning they don't have access to affordable, nutritious food. Manitoba also has the highest child poverty rate of any province, 10 per cent higher than the national average. People who experience food insecurity are more likely to experience malnutrition, infection, chronic disease, difficulty learning, social exclusion, mental illness and depression.

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