

# Unpacking a Harvest hamper, part 2



Last month, we explored the perishable (fresh) foods in a typical Harvest hamper.

Today, as we explore the non-perishable (packaged or canned) goods, we appreciate the combined nutritional value, emotional comfort and culinary potential contained in the Harvest hamper.

## A hearty, healthy start

I have never had a two-pound (907 grams) bag of green lentils in my larder. I checked out lentil nutrition and recipes. Turns out I've been missing a tasty, healthy food. I found one-pot recipes and kid-friendly recipes at MyFussyEater.com and I'm going to try it out.

The other carb and starch staple in my hamper is a two-pound bag of long-grain white rice. This I know. Cook for about 15 minutes, serve with a little salt, butter, soya, or taco seasoning and you're done.



Supplied photo

Canned fruit (any kind) is the No. 1 most-wanted item you can put in the Harvest Tin For The Bin. You'll find out why in a later article.

## Sleuthing

As I was reading the labels, I saw that the rice and lentils (along with a can of chickpeas) all came from The For Good Foundation. Like Harvest, they are Food

Bank Canada members, and their mission is to turn surplus crops into nutritious foods for those who need it most. It was a real-world insight into the many people and organizations working behind the scenes to feed hungry Manitobans. (Thank you!)

## Hamper helpers

Also in the box were two 100-gram tins of tuna from The For Good Foundation and a 796 ml can of diced tomatoes. Even I know what to do with these. The tuna is a prime, family-friendly protein to make sandwiches and casseroles more nutritious. Diced tomatoes can go into sauces, chilis, soups, salsa for dips and nachos... I found an online recipe for lentil Bolognese, and I can use crushed tomatoes and lentils, so that's the dish I'll make.

It turns out that can of chickpeas can be more versatile than I thought. For snacking, you can crisp them up on a baking sheet using nothing but a bit salt. You can toss them straight into a salad for texture, fibre and taste, whip them into hummus, or braise them with olive oil and spice to make a garnish, snack or dish. I can really see how a food-challenged family would be able to up their game using these items.

## Comfort food

I know many people would consider peanut butter a nutritional staple. But for a hungry family, I think it's just as important as a comfort food. When mealtimes are tough, a jar of peanut butter is a smooth soothe.

Rice Krispies is a 95-year-old breakfast tradition, but if I can find marshmallows... well, then I've got dessert, too.

Then I came to a 10-bag box of extra buttery flavour popcorn. Really. What could give a food-challenged family more comfort and normalcy than sharing a bowl of popcorn during a movie or a table game? Emotional calories make tough times better.

And finally, I see another old friend, a four-pouch box of chicken noodle soup. This is kindling for hundreds of soups and dishes. And kids will eat it.

## More than the sum of its parts

Last, there was one box of genuine Kleenex. Everybody needs them. And what you don't spend on Kleenex, you can spend on food. Add it all up (with the perishables) and you begin to see how Harvest hampers as the main ingredient for nourishing kids, families and our community. Personally, in that light, I think you could say it's comfort food for all of us.

That's it for now. As to what's in the hamper for the third article in this series, even I don't know. But just by looking at the table, I think you'll approve.

*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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