



Comments on 2020-21

To Our Fellow Manitobans,

It's time to transform how Harvest Manitoba serves our province.

Prior to the fiscal year beginning April 1, 2020, as the world started to experience the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province of Manitoba had to shut down large parts of the economy and society. Thousands lost their jobs or had hours cut back. Support for people in need was severely restricted. And Harvest Manitoba (Harvest) had just finished a fiscal year that weakened our financial position.

Harvest was not prepared to deal with the challenges that hit our organization with the onset of the pandemic. Public health concerns caused us to lose volunteers, who play a critical role in the operations of our organization, at the same time as we saw unprecedented demand for food in the community.

Our Community Food Network and staff quickly realized that our high-touch, personalized approach to distributing food would have to change. Retail and wholesale grocery donors realized that shortages and supply chain issues would severely restrict their ability to continue to provide most of the food that Harvest shares with its clients.

Through unprecedented financial support from many sources and quickly finding new food sources, we changed our distribution methods to ensure our clients, partners, and staff stayed safe. We confirmed that everyone who requested food support received it safely and promptly during an incredibly challenging year for everyone. We are so proud of everyone who made this possible.

From where did the financial support come? The Government of Canada and National brands stepped in to provide funding through Food Banks Canada. Locally, organizations like The Winnipeg Foundation and the Winnipeg Jets players made significant donations, and Manitobans stepped up with gifts to Harvest, unlike anything in our experience. Thank you for being there for us at a difficult time.

What impact did this generosity have on Harvest? By the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year, our revenue exceeded our expenses by \$6.5 million, even with additional food purchasing and distribution costs. The surplus generated was due to the quick understanding and generosity of thousands of Manitobans, coupled with practical limitations to execute plans that could have increased support to those in need. Pulling together, we ensured that food kept moving to those who needed it, but we all look forward to a return of some favourite features of our pre-pandemic service delivery.

As we approached the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year and the beginning of the 2021-22 year, everyone hoped that the worst of the pandemic was behind us. As we write this in May of 2022, we all know that the pandemic created suffering and loss throughout 2021. Its tragic consequences are still being felt today, particularly by people with fewer resources and lower incomes.

The number of people who need the services of Harvest Manitoba increased dramatically in the early weeks of the pandemic. In 2022, that need continued to grow as price inflation and continued economic uncertainty challenge many in our community. In fact, in March 2022 Harvest served 88,000 Manitobans in a single month compared to an average of less than 50,000 in 2019 – an increase of 80%!

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The reality of the pandemic continues as new inflation challenges threaten the food security of even more Manitobans.

As we show in our 2020-21 Gratitude Report ([link](#)) we received and distributed approximately one million pounds of food every month. This food has an approximate value of \$2.6 million a month or more than \$30 million per year. We require a predictable and consistent increase in volume and distribution capacity to serve the growing number of clients and can only do that through donations – of food, volunteer time, and funds.

Thanks to the financial generosity of Manitobans, we can begin work on a number of significant and wide-ranging initiatives to strengthen Harvest Manitoba.

Four top priorities among those initiatives include:

- Investing in the Community Food Network and our food distribution capacity.
- Ensuring a resilient supply of fresh and shelf-stable food.
- Strengthening our community relationships to provide a connection with those who need us most.
- Expanding Indigenous and northern initiatives.

We look forward to the road ahead to better serve all Manitobans.

Signature

Marilyn McLaren
Board Chair

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