



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Food Bank Usage Is Up Across Alberta

Airdrie AB – The shelves are bare at many food banks across the province while most are also trying to cope with higher demand for services as a result of the slowdown in Alberta’s economy.

In just the last two weeks, the provincial association of food banks has shipped a record 78 pallets of food to 24 food banks who are struggling to keep food on the shelves – that’s in addition to six transport trailers of food distributed to larger food banks.

“When the economy slips food banks are stretched to meet the increased demands, but at this time of year they are doubly challenged because donations tend to fall off in the summer,” said Stephanie Rigby, Executive Director of Alberta Food Banks.

Hinton, a town located an hour east of Jasper, is seeing very high demand for services this year. They expect this year’s numbers to hit or exceed levels from last year – a year that was the highest demand in a decade.

“I believe the increased price of food and continued high cost of housing in relation to income are the factors most at play,” said Bernie Kreiner, president of the Hinton Food Bank Association.

The story is very similar in the city of **St. Albert**, where the food bank has seen between 19-27 new families requesting service each month this year.

“In June we helped 31 new families. The reason people are coming for help include job loss, a decrease in their working hours or they have a new job and have not been paid yet,” said the St. Albert Food Bank’s Executive Director Suzan Krescy.

There has been a staggering increase of food bank usage further north in **Fort McMurray** – the Wood Buffalo Food Bank Association saw a 57% increase in usage in the first six months of 2015, over last year’s figures, said Executive Director Arianna Johnson.

“There is a clear increase in need in our community. While people are not specifically citing layoffs as the reason for usage the symptoms of layoffs and cut backs are all being mentioned as reasons such as fleeing domestic violence, loss of income, waiting for EI, denied EI,” said Ms. Johnson.

Airdrie has witnessed a drastic increase in food bank usage over the last 3-4 years, due partly to their fast growing community. In 2015, their usage has shown a 20% increase compared to last year, due to the economy, high cost of food and people out of work, said Executive Director and Vice Chair of the Alberta Food Banks, Lori McRitchie.

“We are seeing a rise in first time users, seniors and families at our food bank. Children make up 47% of the 2,000 people we feed each month and our shelves are the lowest they have ever been. We could definitely use some help,” said Lori McRitchie.

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How can you help? Contact your local food bank and find out what their main needs are. The Airdrie Food Bank posts a **What's Needed List** on their website at www.airdriefoodbank.com/whatsneeded and updates it often. Currently, they need key staples items such as canned vegetables and fruit, canned meat/fish, peanut butter, canned pasta and coffee.

"When in doubt, consider making a financial donation to your local food bank," said Ms. Rigby of Alberta Food Banks. "The need at food banks is year-round."

Food banks operate through the generous donations of food and funds and nearly half the food banks in Alberta are run completely by volunteers.

In **Viking**, a small town southeast of Edmonton, the food bank normally provides 47 food hampers over an entire year. As of this month the food bank has already handed out 50 hampers.

"We have always given out hampers to seniors on fixed incomes with unexpected expenses, individuals with various disabilities, and families who just can't make it to the end of the month," said Darren Anderson, of the Viking Food Bank. "I have observed an increase in people moving to the area hoping for work or thinking they had work arranged here only to have it disappear."

"We also have seen a number of people on disability leaving urban areas to move to less expensive rural areas."

In Calgary, the impact was seen early in 2015 but the tide has started to shift.

"The surge we saw in the new year has not been sustained. We saw a large influx in the early spring but those numbers have eased," said Shawna Ogston, spokesperson for the Calgary Food Bank. "Things have evened out to a manageable level. However we have seen an increase in the number of times people need help. Typically where one hamper was good, people now need 2 to 3 to get back on their feet."

Almost 850,000 Canadians turn to food banks in an average month and of these, over 36% are children. In Alberta the average percentage of children served is 43%. In 2014, nearly half of the food banks in Alberta reported an increase in usage over the previous year.

Alberta Food Banks is the provincial association of food banks, with 63 members. Each member food bank is a non-profit society and registered charity. There are an estimated 115 food banks across Alberta.

Airdrie Food Bank collects and distributes food to those in need and educates the community on hunger related issues, alleviating hunger in our community. They provide assistance to clients within Airdrie, Crossfield, Balzac, Beiseker, Madden and surrounding area.

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