



# THE DEPOT'S HEALTHY FOOD POLICY

# ABOUT THE HEALTHY FOOD POLICY

## PURPOSE & COMMITMENT

***AT THE DEPOT, NUTRITIOUS AND DELICIOUS FOOD FUELS SOLIDARITY. WE ENVISION A THRIVING AND CONNECTED COMMUNITY WHERE NOURISHING FOOD IS ACCESSIBLE AND REALIZED AS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT.***



In Quebec, nearly 1 in 6 people experience food insecurity. That is over 1.3 million people who can't regularly afford to put food on the table. The root causes of food insecurity are poverty and inequality. Low-income communities face numerous structural barriers that prevent them from accessing healthy food and are disproportionately affected by diet-related diseases. The Depot acknowledges the vital role that nutrition plays in promoting overall health and well-being.

As an organization, we are committed to advocating alongside our partners, for policies that address the structural barriers to food security. Our food system, as it stands, exacerbates the challenges of food insecurity. Ultra-processed foods are aggressively marketed and readily available, while fresh, local produce remains expensive and less accessible. This inequity is

compounded by the fact that farmers—who play an essential role in feeding our communities—are undervalued and underpaid for their work.

At The Depot, we are committed to using our purchasing power to support local food producers and prioritize fresh, culturally relevant, and nutrient-dense foods in all of our programs.

We are dedicated to challenging the status quo and committed to being a leader and active contributor to food justice work, locally in Montreal, across Quebec, and federally in Canada.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR PURCHASING AND DISTRIBUTION

Aware of the significant impact we have within the food system, we are committed to the continuous improvement of our food procurement and the ways we share food in our programs. This means that we deliberately consider the entire food system when sourcing food.

The Depot recognizes that a healthy diet varies across cultures and individuals. We prioritize sourcing foods that reflect a balanced diet guided by Canada's Food Guide, and current best practices while considering the diverse needs and preferences of our community.

## **This means increasing access to:**

- Fresh fruits and vegetables that are locally sourced and sustainably grown in addition to affordable produce that is preferred by the diverse communities of NDG and may come from further away.
- Nutrient-dense food staples that are minimally processed.





# OUR SPENDING PRIORITIES

- 1** Fresh vegetables and fruit, sourced from local farmers and sustainably grown whenever possible\*
- 2** Whole grains, prioritizing Quebec-grown varieties when possible
- 3** Lean proteins: eggs, beans and pulses, canned fish, raw nuts and seeds and all-natural nut butters
- 4** Meat that is sustainably and ethically raised, purchased from Quebec farmers whenever possible
- 5** Milk and unsweetened non-dairy milk
- 6** Everyday staple and whole foods\* that support cooking culturally-specific dishes at home

**\*The Depot prioritizes building relationships with farmers who cultivate foods without the use of pesticides and are located within a 100 km radius.**

# YOUR GENEROSITY POWERS THE DEPOT

*YOUR SUPPORT MAKES EVERYTHING WE DO POSSIBLE — FROM NOURISHING OUR COMMUNITY WITH FRESH, HEALTHY FOOD TO CREATING SPACES WHERE PEOPLE CAN CONNECT AND THRIVE. HERE ARE A FEW WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE:*

## MONETARY DONATIONS

Your generosity powers The Depot's work to ensure everyone in our community has access to nourishing food. You can make a general donation to support all of our programs, or give to our Fresh Food Fund to help us purchase fresh, healthy food for community members experiencing food insecurity.

## VOLUNTEER

Join us by volunteering for a regular weekly shift or at special events. Your time is invaluable to helping us serve the community.

## SPREAD THE WORD

Tell your friends, family, and community about The Depot. By raising awareness about food insecurity and the work we do, you help expand our reach and strengthen our impact.



\*We are committed to keeping our supporters informed about our spending priorities, conducting regular evaluations, and reporting on the impact of our programs.



# GROW

Participants grow their own veggies and herbs, while building meaningful connections and participating in knowledge-exchange with other community members.

**\$29,058** of food was grown in collective gardens

**52** types of vegetables, fruits and herbs were grown in the collective gardens

**82%** of participants reported making or deepening community connections and friendships in the gardens

**69%** of participants report feeling healthier as a result of participation in the garden programs



# COOK

Cooking workshops bring people together to develop food literacy and skills, exchange experience, prepare and eat nutritious meals from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

**231** food literacy workshops were held for children, families and adults

*"I learnt that although Canada is cold, its people are warm (and kind hearted) and that people from different countries can come together as a community around food, which is a shared language."*

-Community Kitchens Participant



# SHARE

Through our food distribution, meal program, mobile markets and snack program, participants have access to healthy food that inspires them to cook more at home.

**270,000 lbs** of vegetables and fruits distributed

**43,000** healthy meals served at The Resto Depot

**10** local farm partnerships

**69%** of participants say they eat more fruits and vegetables because of the Marché Depot.



# MOBILIZE

Our volunteer program and Social Justice Group aim to combat despair and drive meaningful social change by addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

**35** social justice group meetings were held

The Social Justice Group successfully advocated alongside our Community Food Centers Canada partners and Disability without Poverty for the **passing into law of Bill C-22**, a federal income supplement that moves people with disability out of poverty.

## FALL 2017

Year long research project with the support of the McGill Nutrition program that included focus groups with participants, volunteers and staff

## 2019

The Depot Wins "Coup de cœur" from Quebec Government Health and Social Services Annual Awards for our Healthy Food Policy and its implications in programming

## 2021

Update of our Healthy Food Policy and rethinking of our food distribution model

## 2024

Healthy Food Policy is updated

## SPRING 2017

Participated in multiple trainings and workshop series through Community Food Centres Canada (CFC) about best practices around Healthy Food Policies and food procurement

## FALL 2018

Implementation of our Healthy Food Policy

Creation of 'Needs List' priority donation items

The Depot moved to a new space

## 2020

COVID

Temporary Transition to monthly home delivery system

The Depot stops taking food donations

## 2022

Opening of Marché Depot: a grocery store model where households are now allotted a monthly amount of "Depot dollars" to spend which has a portion specifically allocated to fresh fruits and vegetables and a portion allocated to dry staple goods

# OUR TRANSFORMATION

*OUR HEALTHY FOOD POLICY HAS BEEN A PIVOTAL TOOL IN TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE PROVIDE EMERGENCY FOOD ACCESS AT THE DEPOT COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE. FOUNDED IN 1986 AS THE NDG FOOD DEPOT, WE HAVE EVOLVED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE YEARS.*

Several initiatives laid the foundation for the Healthy Food Policy:

## **2014 - LAUNCH OF FREE DROP-IN COMMUNITY MEALS**

We began offering free community meals during emergency food basket distribution times, allowing participants to enjoy healthy, seasonal recipes featuring foods from our baskets.

## **2015 - MERGER**

The merger of three pillar NDG community organizations- The Depot, Action Communautaire, and Boîte à Lunch - strengthened our collective focus on addressing food insecurity.

## **2015 - CREATION OF A FRESH FOOD FUND**

We established a fresh food fund, and significantly increased our budget for purchasing fresh fruit, vegetables, and whole foods (240% over 3 years)

## **CROSS-POLLINATION OF PROGRAMS**

Participants from the emergency food basket and community meal program were actively recruited to join our complementary food access and skill-building programs like community kitchens, collective gardens, and low-cost markets and vice versa.

## **2017-2018 - PARTICIPANT-CENTRED RESEARCH**

We conducted focus groups with participants, volunteers, and staff to explore what healthy food means within our programs. Additionally, a McGill Master's Nutrition research project focused on food access and the desire for more healthy food among Emergency Food Basket participants (2017).

## **IN 2018, WE ADOPTED OUR HEALTHY FOOD POLICY,**

marking a significant shift from distributing food from a church basement with a heavy reliance on donated items that included a high percentage of processed and ultra-processed foods.

## **OUR FIRST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE**

was creating a mini storefront and ensuring that essential staple ingredients were always available to participants. They would meet a volunteer at the counter and choose their biweekly emergency groceries based on categories, selecting only the items they wanted. The positive impact of this shift became clear quickly, as participants could reliably count on consistently having access to the same staple ingredients.



## **COMMUNICATION WAS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THESE SHIFTS.**

We created documents to explain “what’s in your basket” to participants, and did significant outreach to our in-kind donors, providing a list of priority items to donate that were part of our inventory. We began encouraging people to donate money over food, highlighting our purchasing power (for every dollar donated we could purchase three dollars worth of food), in addition to the heavy logistics required to manage food donations.

## **IN 2019**

The Depot’s Healthy Food Policy was honored with the [Coup de coeur des ministres](#) award by the Quebec Health and Social Services Ministry, recognizing its outstanding contribution to Québec’s health and social services network.



## **IN 2020, DUE TO THE PANDEMIC**

all of our in-person food programming was put on hold. Our Emergency Food services transitioned to a delivery model, providing participants with a monthly delivery that more than doubled in size. Initially, the pandemic saw our numbers skyrocket, and as income supports like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) were introduced, our numbers levelled out to represent pre-pandemic demand. During this time, we stopped accepting food donations, which would become a permanent change.



## IN 2021, AFTER FURTHER REFLECTION

and gaining access to more square footage for our programming space, we once again pushed ourselves to enhance our offering and increase choice for our participants. In November, participants returned to onsite programming, and our emergency food services transitioned to a grocery store-style setup with even more variety and choice of staple ingredients. Households now receive a monthly allocation of "Depot dollars" to spend, with part designated specifically for fresh fruits and vegetables and another portion reserved for dry staple goods.

## THESE CHANGES HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT,

even amidst unprecedented demand for our services. When participants visit The Depot for emergency food services, they know exactly what will be available to them, allowing them to plan their groceries with more confidence. In 2023 alone, we distributed over 730,000 lbs of food to community members experiencing food insecurity, with over a third of that being fresh fruits and vegetables. Participants' feedback in our annual program survey, completed in November 2023, underscores the success of these efforts: 98% of Marché Depot participants stated that The Depot provides them with an important source of healthy food; 69% reported increased consumption of fruits and vegetables due to participating in The Depot's programs.

## OUR TRANSFORMATION



# GET IN TOUCH

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