

Dear Editor:

Recently I have become very concerned about the food we eat.

A year ago, the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (www.fwio.on.ca) started investigating the situation whereby small abattoirs and meat plants were closing at an alarming rate in Ontario. Since then, much research and information sharing has been done.

The standards for food produced in Ontario are very high – producers are restricted as far as chemicals, processes and facilities they can use to produce our food. But that is NOT the case in other places around the world.

Look at what you are buying. If the label says “Packaged for.....Ltd, Ontario” that likely means that the food was grown, and likely processed somewhere other than in Ontario – and that be anywhere, and using anything! The packaging likely cost more than the food itself, so it can be called a Canadian product.

For example – a can of peaches bearing a Canadian label likely has fruit which was grown and processed somewhere other than here, and cost the packager about 25 cents. It arrives in Canada in barrels and is put into a can or jar in sanitary conditions and labelled Canadian. Following Canadian standards, a farmer here cannot produce those peaches for 25 cents a can – nor would I expect them to!

This year, by February 12, the average Canadian family had earned enough to buy ALL the food they will eat ALL YEAR! How long do you suppose it took us to earn enough for all the things we don't need? At least, don't need as badly as we need healthy food?

And what are we doing to our ability to feed ourselves in this country?

There are things we can do as consumers. Talk to the employees, managers and owners/franchise-holders where we buy our food and push for honest, valid answers. Example – meat that displays the crest and the words “Canada Grade A” will also have a number in the circle. That number can tell the vendor what country the meat came from. “Canada Grade A” only means that it met Canadian standards for things such as marbling – nothing to do with where it came from or what chemicals and processes might have been used in its production.

Consider WHAT we buy – do I really need strawberries all year round? Especially when they could have been irrigated with sewage-infested water? Why not really enjoy Ontario berries in season (if you can find them in your grocery store!) and freeze, preserve or make jam for the rest of the year? And this applies to much more than berries!

Think about WHERE we buy our food. There are 100-mile stores which sell only food produced locally. Some independents also sell locally produced food as much as possible. Ask!

Buying directly from the producer allows you to see where and how the food is produced and to ask questions. Farmers' Markets often make this easy. Your local Food Link or Culinary Association will be able to help you find local food producers.

CSA (Community Shared/Sponsored/Supported Agriculture) is also out there. As a consumer, I pay the producer a set amount for my share of the season's produce – and I can see it growing!

Grow our own. Maybe share with a friend – I put tomatoes in pots or bags on my sunny deck while one friend grows beans and another has room for carrots and onions.

We can talk to elected officials and those looking for our votes this Fall – What are they going to do about honest labelling of our food so we can choose to buy local, accountable food if we wish? And how would they support local food supply?

Watch for information meetings in the area and come out to learn. We have found a number of groups who are interested in secure food supply for us Ontarians – Sustain Ontario, Weston A. Price Foundation, Women's Institutes, Food Links, Culinary Associations, general farm groups such as CFFO, EFO, NFU, OFA, to name a few. Consider signing petitions, writing letters or whatever you can.

As consumers, we MUST think about what we put into our stomachs. Our health depends on it and our families deserve safe, healthy food!

Respectfully,