

**Montessori Adolescent Summit on Food Security, Manifesto
Strata Montessori School, Ontario, CA, March, 2017**

Access to healthy food is something that everyone deserves and should have the right to. However, this is not the reality in the modern world. While we have the ability to produce more than enough food for everyone, issues such as financial stability, access, education, and Government support for the established industry has lead to a significant community problem in the form of food insecurity.

Everyone should have access to healthy organic food, but not everyone does. Areas with limited access are known as food deserts, where fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthy whole foods are unavailable due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers markets, and other healthy food providers within easy travel distance. This is a big problem, because instead of healthy food providers we have “quickie marts” and “fast foods”, which are very unhealthy, especially if it is all you have access to! Local Government needs to adopt proposals such as Hamilton’s Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) which will expand the availability of nutritious food by developing and equipping grocery stores, corner stores and farmers markets with fresh and healthy food.

There are challenges to growing organic food that may prevent farmers from choosing to grow this way. We need to educate our community and get the government to simplify the policies governing local organic farming, enabling more farmers to farm in this way. There should also be support for research into developing methods that keep pests away from crops without spraying or altering the crop in any ways. The government needs to stop funding GMO corn and soy farmers and help local organics instead. The government needs to educate the public about organic and local options, help subsidize the price of organic produce and assist in developing a local farm economy that will allow independent farmers to earn enough money for themselves, to pay workers a living wage, and produce more food. For those who don’t have have organic food easily accessible, farmers should have support to deliver produce to their communities through expanded farmers market locations and dates.

Eating organic, unprocessed food is healthy and the right way to go. However there are some accessibility issues. Community kitchens are a good place where those who do not have kitchen facilities can go and cook for themselves - saving money and greatly improving the quality of the food that is available to them. Community organizations with kitchen facilities should make available to the public their facilities. Additionally, to allow access to inexpensive and fresh organic produce, community members need to be granted access to community gardens where people share land and grow together. Support for these endeavors need to include growing education, skills training, and supplies and tools to make this an accessible option for those without means to these items on their own. If easy access is granted, more people will buy and eat organic.

At the moment social assistance rates are far too low to retain a healthy diet on top of the other costs of living. The government needs to spend more on social assistance because much of the money that is spent on healthcare goes towards chronic diseases caused by a poor diet. Consequently by spending more on social assistance, we will be spending less on healthcare.

Everyone should have enough money to provide themselves with a healthy lifestyle. We, as individuals and within our communities can support companies that are committed to a living wage.

We believe that everyone should buy local, and if possible organic. Buying local will eliminate the need to import food that we are capable of supplying locally. Our local governments need to update local zoning and laws, to allow local farmers to sell their produce at local markets. Additionally, we strongly believe there should be more support for young men and women to become farmers. Farming should be supported in our current education system. Presently farming is not an inviting option for a career because it does not provide a living wage.

Education should also be extended to those in food compromised positions. It is important to have access to education about food issues and enable everyone to educate themselves, otherwise they will most likely make less informed and longterm negative choices about diet.

Access to good quality, fresh food should be a right for all in every community. Through increased Government support like financial subsidies and legislation, better education for both the public and those who wish to pursue a career on the farm, and increased access to fresh, good quality food, people can have a choice in what they put in their bodies, ultimately benefitting themselves, their families and our communities.