

FOOD SECURITY during a PANDEMIC

Alice De La Plante
Diocese of Ontario
Green Group

In one way, we are blessed that this virus is happening in the spring, when people can dig their 'Pandemic Plots' to grow vegetables. Possibly enough to store some for winter. During the World Wars we called them 'Victory Gardens,' but the circumstances then were very different. Our current challenges are as follows.

Climate change as a reality, requiring every living creature and growing plant on Earth to adjust. Super storms that once washed over and blew down everything in their path, once every 100 years, now occur every 20 years. A mega-drought may be occurring, at year twenty-one of drought conditions in the American South West and in Mexico. The population's demands,

even needs, from North America's food basket will likely face shortages.

Large multi-national corporations have taken over control of our seeds, fertilizers and deliveries of product, to provide 'just-in-time' resources. In his book, 'Uncertain Harvest,' co-authored with two others, Guelph University's Evan Fraser, a guest on TVO's Agenda in February, advises us to change to a locally based and controlled, 'just in case' system. This would include growing and storage of foods closer to home. Food must remain a necessity, not a commodity.

Farming systems dependent on 60,000 migrant workers, travelling north to Canada from Caribbean regions every spring. They plant, tend

and harvest for us and have been a part of the international fabric for centuries, with families back home dependent on them for support. Some have come to the same farms for decades. Now, with travel and border crossing restrictions, quarantine requirements and illnesses, their numbers are drastically reduced. Crop losses will follow unless our Canadian unemployed can be trained to work back on the farms. This takes time. We must think about how to build a society where less outside help is required; to continue to become more locally sustainable.

40% of our food is processed, with livestock to feed and house. There is not enough capacity here in Canada, making

us dependent on the U.S. where plants are closing. Workers cannot carry on in crowded warehouses without the outbreaks of illness that we've seen in beef processing plants in Alberta, poultry plants in B.C., and pig processing plants in the U.S. Factories need a complete overhaul to permit social-distancing for staff, with frequent disinfection of equipment and better fresh air circulation. People are encouraged to eat less meat; corporate stockholders to care about workers, more than their dividends.

Fish provide 20% of our protein, according to Dr. Philip Loring of Guelph University and the Arrell Food Institute. But warming oceans and deep-sea trawling, which destroys natural habitats, are devastating this resource. 60% of fertilizers scattered by huge spreaders, are washed off the fields into

our freshwater rivers and lakes, killing aquatic life. One third of our food is dependent on pollinators, which are also dying from these toxins.

COVID—19 has tossed a wild card into this mix. The fragility and critical weaknesses of our food systems are being revealed. Someone once said, "The animals look at each other differently when the well runs dry."

Something to think about as we prepare strategies for feeding the poor and face price hikes, while working in our community gardens & enjoy digging in our Pandemic Plots. On this troubling note I refer the reader to author, C. S. Lewis.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Over 60,000 migrant workers travel to Canada each spring to work local farms. Photo-Shutterstock.

