



# Research Series

## Assessing the Good Food Box

by Marilyn Brownlee and Allison Cammer

Since 1997, the Child Hunger and Education Program (CHEP) has operated the Good Food Box (GFB) program, which sells and distributes fresh and affordable local produce in Saskatoon. While the program is undeniably successful—it distributes between 1,000 and 1,800 boxes each month—CHEP is always looking to improve the GFB program, and recently commissioned a study to determine its impact on two of its goals: increasing citizen's access to affordable healthy food and promoting healthy eating. To this end, Marilyn Brownlee and Allison Cammer, authors of *Assessing the Good Food Box*, interviewed GFB participants and stakeholders to discuss the program's perceived strengths, weaknesses, and possible improvements.

Forty-two households involved in Quint Development Corporation's affordable housing program were recruited to join the program. In exchange for subsidized GFBs of fresh fruits and vegetables, these individuals agreed to answer regular questionnaires and participate in interviews.

Three main themes emerged from these discussions. First, in terms of access, participants believed that although the GFB was a more economical means of purchasing healthy food, it was not the easiest method because it involved ordering and picking up food only on specific days. Co-ordinating schedules and budgets often proved difficult. Participants suggested more flexibility regarding ordering and pick up procedures, as well as some form of reminder system. An additional suggestion was to sell produce through a core neighbourhood-based grocery store or traveling market.

Second, most participants stated that receiving the GFB improved their family's eating habits, because of both the food quality and recipes included with each box. Many also found that they made a point of not letting such good food go to waste, giving excess items to friends and relatives. Suggestions for building on these gains included publishing a cookbook (using GFB ingredients) and partnering with other food-related programs, like Collective Kitchens.

Third, over the study's three months, participants began making connections between health and community development. For example, many grew to see the links between housing and food costs and barriers to obtaining quality of food, and began appreciating the virtues of supporting the local economy and, in general, becoming more community-minded. In short, participants began to understand the politics of food.

A significant barrier to increasing participation in the GFB program is that many believe it to be exclusively for the poor. Because of this, fear of being perceived as poor or not wanting to take food away from those in need prevents many from contacting the program. It is extremely important for the program to dispel this misconception and to assert their mission of promoting the importance of nutritious food, regardless of income level.

Brownlee and Cammer's study works as both a promotional piece to summarize GFB's mission and many accomplishments, while offering a valuable critique of the program's weaknesses and how they might be addressed. GFB provides a vital service and deserves greater community support and awareness.