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NIAGARA NEWS

Kitchen hungry to serve food insecure people again after run-ins with Niagara public health

“People are so happy to have our food again,” says St. Catharines’ Craig Adams.

Updated May 15, 2026 at 3:45 p.m.

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Craig Adams says he’s back on track feeding food insecure and unhoused people after being visited by public health inspectors.

Matthew P. Barker/St. Catharines Standard

An “epic journey” to upgrade his St. Catharines kitchen to meet public health requirements has finally concluded for Craig Adams after passing inspections to continue to serve food to people in need.

What started as food recovery for Adams, owner of Fresh Niagara Mushrooms, quickly grew into a community movement feeding people experiencing food insecurity.

In February, Adams was informed a [complaint was received](#) by Niagara Region Public Health regarding him serving food from his home kitchen.

During an inspection, Adams was told his kitchen required about \$12,000 in upgrades to meet public health requirements.

Through [community donations](#) and help from a St. Catharines business, Lifco Hydraulics, Adams was able to get a dedicated handwashing station and an industrial dishwasher installed.

“First, the money came in quick, but this is an old home (built in 1917), so finding something that fit my plumbing and electrical requirements ... was a huge challenge.”

“It was just a magical moment to be like, ‘We did it, we finally got here.’ It’s been an epic journey,” he said.

Now, nearly four months later, Adams is back to cooking for the community.

“It took us some time,” he said.

But not all was well. Adams had to stop feeding people for about two weeks this month after his [kitchen was again shut down](#) by public health, including for having food not obtained from an inspected source and poor record keeping.

“Public health gave us a verbal order to stop cooking ... followed up by a letter saying we could face fines between \$5,000 and \$25,000 if we continued to keep cooking, so we (stopped) right away,” he said.

“That was upsetting for us, but we knew we were so close. We had everything about ready to complete the installation, so that lit a fire under our (butts to) get it done.”

Since the beginning of the year, Adams estimated he has provided about 20,000 meals, or about 1,000 per week, to food-insecure people with the support of donors.

“We started sharing some potatoes (a couple of years ago) and then it became 20 to 30 meals a week, and it grew and now we’re leveling up,” he said.

Right to Food, a national organization aimed at addressing food insecurity across Canada through public policy change, said more people are struggling to feed their families as incomes stagnate and costs soar.

“Rising food and fuel costs aren’t just stretching budgets,” a statement on its website said. “They are forcing households to make harder choices with less room to manoeuvre.

“More families are relying on credit to cover basic needs, and for those with the lowest incomes, both housing and food are becoming increasingly unstable.”

Adams said, “People are so happy to have our food again. They’ve been without our food for two weeks, even just to cook again and see everybody again (is great).”

An important criterion to remain within public health guidelines, Adams said, is to cook food to specific temperatures and maintain certain temperatures for serving — whether soup, pasta or deli-style sandwiches — as well as overall sanitation.

“We’re logging everything out for public health, so we’ve got temperature guns. We’ve got thermometers going in all our insulated boxes (for serving),” he said.

Adams said he started cooking again Tuesday, the first time since receiving compliance.



Matthew P. Barker is a St. Catharines-based general assignment reporter for the Standard.