

time last year



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Almost 300 students used the University of Alberta's food bank this September, double the number from September 2015, while food banks across the city are seeing increased demand.

"It was a little shocking," said U of A food bank executive director Caitlin Phare, noting that October is also on track to be a record-setting month.

When it comes to budgeting, students tend to plan for the year in advance, Phare said, but last year the full effect of the economic downturn hadn't hit yet. But this fall, they're feeling it.

"Jobs aren't available, resources aren't available, tuition isn't going up, but it's still not cheap," she said. "Food is more expensive, gas is more expensive, it's the culmination of a lot of things."

She said the increased demand is a canary in the campus mine: By the time students walk through her door they're



Caitlin Phare, the executive director of the University of Alberta food bank. METRO FILE

usually really getting desperate, implying a larger group is also struggling to get by.

Phare said she is banking on next week's Trick or TrEAT Food Drive to bring in much of their stock for the year.

Most years the 200 or so volunteers going around university neighbourhoods bring in about 8,000 pounds of food, but this year she's really

hoping for 10,000.

It's not just students who are reaching out in record numbers. Over at the Edmonton Food Bank, executive director Marjorie Bencz said they now regularly serve 20,000 people a month, an increase of at least a third over last year.

"I've been with the organization for 25 years and I haven't seen the challenges we've seen

this year," she said.

The challenges include the economic downturn, the Fort McMurray fire and an influx of refugees, she said.

Hampers are going out without the same variety of food they had last year, and on occasion they've had to turn away groups who've volunteered to sort food, because there wasn't enough to sort.