



# Local Harvest

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## Local Farm Profile: Winfield Produce

Nestled amongst the rolling countryside just north of Wallenstein is *Winfield Produce Farm*, home of Alvin and Nancy Gingrich and their four children. Renowned for fresh shelled garden peas, Winfield is yet another fine example of a local food success story right in our own backyard!

Alvin began his farming career some 25 years ago specializing in beef and pork production. But like many other area farmers involved in livestock production, he was affected by falling prices and the BSE crisis and made the switch to fresh produce. "About ten years ago I was presented with an opportunity to purchase a pea combine through a friend," says Alvin. "I really didn't know how things would turn out but I decided to take a chance," he reflects.

Today, it appears that all has turned out very well for Alvin and his family. The Gingrichs began with a modest three acres and gradually added a few acres each year. Now they have over 30 acres of peas and are one of only two farms in all of Ontario specializing in the fresh shelled pea market. The other is located in Belleville, Ontario.

Alvin Gingrich is also a founding member of the Elmira Produce Auction Cooperative (EPAC). "Many of us were looking to diversify back a few years ago," says Alvin adding that "the auction initiative helped us find viable alternatives and wholesale markets for our product." While continuing to serve on the EPAC board Alvin's peas can be found at the auction throughout the season.

In fact, Winfield product is hard to miss because the shelled peas are conveniently packaged in



*At Winfield Produce Farm peas go from field to package in a mere three hours.*

one-pound bags bearing the *Buy Local! Buy Fresh!* brand logo. Winfield was one of the first to use Foodlink's BLBF logo on their packaging, a logical vehicle to deliver the message to consumers that they are getting a quality, local product.

While many of us enjoy the delicious, sweet pearly vegetable, not all have a full appreciation of how labour intensive pea harvesting is. If you've ever had the opportunity of picking and shelling your own peas, imagine harvesting more than a tonne per day! That's exactly what the Gingrich family does but luckily they have some specialized equipment to help with the task.

*continued on page 2*



## Local Food Profile continued

It all begins with a first planting in early to mid April, using a regular grain drill that deposits the seeds in seven-inch rows. Alvin plants four varieties of garden peas—bearing the fanciful names of *strike*, *jaguar*, *starlight* and *citation*. The idea is to have a continuous yield throughout the season, says Alvin, who also practices crop rotation to keep the soil rich. Ideal conditions include weather that is not too hot and moderate moisture. Compared to other vegetables peas are a relatively easy plant to grow and tend to be resistant to disease.

Peas are harvested when the pods are bright green and almost round in diameter. “There is only about a two-day window”, Alvin points out. “If they are picked too early the delicate pods tend to get smashed by the combine and if they are picked too late they become bitter and starchy.” In June the first peas are harvested. In one continuous motion the combine cuts the plant, mechanically shells the peas and discards the plant back onto the field.

At Winfield Produce Farm freshness is imperative. The peas go from combine to package in a mere three hours. Alvin refers to his eldest son Nelson as his “right hand man”. He also gratefully acknowledges the help of his wife Nancy, and his other three children who are rapidly learning the ropes.

Once the peas have been picked and shelled they then enter a large shed where they are graded, washed in ice water, spun dry and electronically packaged. “Generally what we bring in each morning is out by noon,” says Alvin adding that the highly specialized equipment was designed and built in his brother’s sheet metal fabrication shop next door.



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Although Winfield Farm’s initial focus for their peas was retail and selling farmgate, Alvin has gradually moved towards volume production and wholesale markets. In addition to selling through EPAC, he sells locally to Wallenstein General Store, Foodland Elmira, Martin’s Family Fruit Farm, Herrle’s Country Farm Market and Early Dale Meats in Floradale. He also supplies further afield to stores as far as Toronto and is currently pursuing LFP (Local Food Plus) certification as an additional perk for buyers.

In Waterloo Region and environs the word is out that Winfield peas are among the finest. Some of Alvin’s neighbours still insist on going directly to his farm to purchase large quantities of peas. For the rest of us these precious peas can be purchased at the St. Jacobs Market Farmers’ Shed at Joseph Martin’s booth. Just look for the BLBF bags filled with fresh, shelled emerald coloured gems. They are so delicious that they might not last till you get home!



## Finding Locally Grown Peas in Waterloo Region

If you’re looking for peas why not consult Foodlink’s Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. The 2008 edition features a number of farms close by that grow and sell them. Please call for hours and availability.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  <p><b>Herrle’s Country Farm Market</b><br/>1243 Erb’s Rd W<br/>St. Agatha<br/>Tel: 519-886-7576</p> |  <p><b>Brubacher’s Produce</b><br/>1562 Halm Rd, West Montrose<br/>Tel: 519-664-3214</p> |  <p><b>Maynard Martin</b><br/>7524 Reid Woods Drive, Elmira<br/>Tel: 519-669-0246</p>                              |
|  <p><b>Windy Lane Acres</b><br/>1041 Huron Street<br/>New Hamburg<br/>Tel: 519-662-3889</p>          |  <p><b>Fresh Garden Produce</b><br/>144 Southfield Dr., Elmira<br/>Tel: 519-669-4108</p> |  <p><b>Stevanus Family Farm</b><br/>1082 Snyder’s Flats Road, Bloom-<br/>ingdale<br/>Tel: 519-585-7784</p>         |
|  <p><b>Martin’s Family Fruit Farm</b><br/>1420 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo<br/>Tel: 519-664-2750</p>    |  <p><b>Brian Martin</b><br/>1261 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo<br/>Tel: 519-664-1358</p>      |  <p><b>Woodside Country Farm<br/>Produce Market</b><br/>770 Hawkesville Road, St. Jacobs<br/>Tel: 519-664-2726</p> |
|  <p><b>Orchard Hill Produce</b><br/>7203 Blind Line, Elmira<br/>Tel: 519-669-0815</p>                |  <p><b>Maurice Martin</b><br/>6049 Line 86, West Montrose<br/>Tel: 519-669-0740</p>      |   |



## Peas & Q's

*"We lived very simply – but with all the essentials of life well understood and provided for – hot baths, cold champagne, new peas and old brandy."* – Winston Churchill, as quoted in 'The Last Lion' by William Manchester (1993).

Canned peas – from home preserves or grocery store shelves – were once a staple vegetable on every child's plate, much to the horror of almost every child. Not only was their mushy texture an appetite suppressant, they were nearly impossible to retrieve with a fork! Pushing peas around a plate became a dinner-time sport for some unhappy diners. Fortunately for true pea lovers, eating a fresh pea, right off the vine and out of its shell, is like eating an entirely different vegetable.

Peas are part of the legume family, plants that have built-in nitrogen sources in the form of symbiotic bacteria, rhizobia, attached to their roots. These bacteria are capable

of converting atmospheric nitrogen into ammonia, which increases plant size and yield. This is an important evolutionary development as most plants require this mineral to be present in the soil. Peas and other legumes such as beans, lentils and peanuts can therefore be grown in nitrogen-poor soil but still flourish. When the plants die, stored nitrogen compounds are released into the soil providing a natural



*It's never too early to enjoy fresh, sweet peas. (Photo Courtesy of Herrle's Country Farm Market)*

form of fertilizer. Until chemical fertilizers were developed, legumes like clover and alfalfa were routinely used in crop rotations to replenish soil nitrogen. On organic farms today, growing legumes is still considered standard fertilization practice.

Peas are divided into two categories: those without edible pods like the green pea, and those with edible pods, such as snow peas and snap peas. Today, of all the green peas grown, only five per cent come to the market fresh; more than half is canned, and most of the rest is frozen. Since green peas grow best in cool, spring weather, the window of opportunity for eating them fresh is quite limited. The good news is that, unlike canned peas, frozen peas are able to retain their flavour and nutrients, while increasing their versatility and shelf life.

The common green, or garden, pea that we grow today is actually derived from field peas such as lentils and chickpeas. Peas were likely domesticated in the region between India and Afghanistan, as well as in modern Ethiopia, since wild progenitors are still found there today. Until about 400 years ago, the pea plant had seeds that were much smaller and darker than the modern green pea and were valued for their storage ability.

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Then, among the elite in 17th century France, it became the height of gastronomic fashion to eat these small seeds fresh, before they had time to ripen and dry. Over the next two hundred years, the English became so adept at producing flavourful varieties of fresh green peas that that these legumes became known as English peas.

Settlers to Canada brought their distinctive pea seeds. While the English had their green peas like *Sutton's Harbinger*, the French brought over the *St. Hubert* variety that became the basis of the classic French Canadian pea soup. *Prussian Blues* from Germany, *Amplissimo Viktoria* from the Ukraine, and *Amish Snaps* all became a part of the early Canadian harvest.

With their round, chubby appearance, peas look to be bursting with health and goodness. High in vitamin C, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid, these vegetables are vitamin powerhouses. One cup of peas provides almost 50% of the daily requirement of vitamin K, more protein than ¼ cup of almonds, 2 g of iron and 7g of fibre. Peas are more than a side dish, they are a super dish!

One might wonder how this versatile and nourishing seed acquired its name. The Latin word for pea, *pisum*, gave rise to its scientific nomenclature, *Pisum sativum*. In Anglo Saxon, the word became *pise*, and then “pease” in English. Because pease sounded like the plural form of the word, the “s” sound was eventually dropped, bringing the word “pea” into modern vernacular.

If you are lucky enough to find good fresh peas this spring, choose pods that are firm and glossy with a slight velvety feel. Pods should not be yellow or speckled, and when shaken the peas shouldn't rattle about inside. Eating them as soon as possible will help to retain their maximum nutrient levels. If they are to be stored, place them unwashed into the refrigerator until ready to use. If kept at room temperature, the sugars quickly begin to convert to starch creating a pea with an unpleasant pasty texture.

Shelling green peas can be a fun group activity. Simply pinch off the stem and pull down on the string that forms between the two pod halves. The pod can then be popped open and the peas extracted.

## WHY GREEN PEAS?

With green peas, good things come in small packages — they're bursting with flavour and nutritional value. An excellent source of vitamin C and fibre, peas are a quick and easy way to add disease-fighting nutrients to your diet.

Peas are one of the few members of the legume family that can be enjoyed fresh. Whether they're in the pod or out, springtime peas are a healthy choice to add to your meals.

Although inedible, the pods make great composting material.

In 2007, Ontario produced 8700 hectares of green peas (60 acres of which were grown on Waterloo Region farms), yielding 34,000 tonnes for a farm value of approximately \$9 million. Peas are an easy plant for the backyard garden, growing quickly in the spring to provide one of the first vegetables of the season. Providing a child with a trellis and a package of seeds is one sure way of nurturing a love for gardening and pride in one's accomplishments.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Between 1856 and 1863, Gregor Johann Mendel grew and tested 29,000 pea plants, culminating in Mendel's Laws of Inheritance that today form the basis of modern genetics.

## Sugar Snap and Green Peas with Lemon and Mint

Peas can add a fresh taste, brilliant colour and nutrition boost to so many dishes. But sometimes they're great just on their own. Here's a simple recipe that features two types of peas—green or garden and sugar snap peas.

### What you will need:

- 12 cups water
- 2 1/2 cups shelled green peas (about 2 pounds unshelled)
- 3 1/2 cups sugar snap peas, trimmed
- 1 1/2 tbsp butter
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground pepper
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh mint
- 2 tsp grated lemon rind



### Method:

1. Bring 3 quarts water to a boil in an 8-quart stockpot or Dutch oven. Add green peas to boiling water; cook 1 minute. Add sugar snap peas; cook 2 minutes or until crisp-tender. Drain and pat dry.
2. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add pea mixture, salt, and pepper to pan; cook 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat; stir in mint and rind.
3. Bake in preheated oven for about 1 hour, or until onions start to turn golden brown on top.

Makes 6 servings.