



# Local Harvest

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Gillespie's Garden

Taste Local! Taste Fresh!  
Fall Food Event 2004

Fresh in Focus:  
"Here's to Ears"

Buying Sweet Corn in  
Waterloo Region

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## Local Harvest

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## Local Farm Profile: Gillespie's Garden



### Where are the produce farmers near Cambridge?

A quick look at the Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map reveals just a couple of farms south and east of Cambridge featuring produce. One of these, Gillespie's Garden, happens to be "the place to go" for the freshest sweet corn around. The Gillespie family has been growing and selling corn and other farm fresh produce at their farm market along Highway 24 for the past 12 years. Whimsical and friendly paintings of corn cob characters and a sand box for kids make their farm store a fun place to stop for corn, beans, carrots, beets, and squash. Depending on the time of year, you may also find locally grown cantaloupe and watermelon just waiting to make it to your table.

So where are the other produce farms around Cambridge? Pam Gillespie explains that many of the farms in the area have been sold for gravel extraction. Their 235-acre dairy and produce farm is now surrounded by gravel pits, a golf course, residential housing and a Tim Horton's. Pam read recently that with so many gravel pits in the area there are more trucking companies in North Dumfries Township than farms. With talk of a highway going through their farm and severing a third of their land, they don't know how long they can keep farming. But farm they do – full-time. Pam runs the store and harvests the smaller crops while Brian plants and harvests the sweet corn and manages the dairy herd. Their daughters, age 17, 15 and 13, help run the store and join in other farm work such as laying irrigation pipes.

Irrigation is a basic necessity on the Gillespie farm, which is in a dry spot of the Region. All 12 acres of sweet corn need irrigation each year in order to survive. But what the corn really needs this year is heat and there's no way a farmer can pipe that in! The cool weather of this summer means that the corn is very slow to ripen. So slow, in fact, that the Gillespie's Garden may have to close for a few days to wait for the corn to ripen as there are so few cobs ready to sell! Brian shows two ears of corn, one is perfectly ripe, and the other is just under-ripe with a slight gap between the rows of kernels. Most of the ears on the stalks are like the under-ripe one, he explains, and the frustrating challenge is figuring out which ear to pick. Usually sweet corn harvesters walk up and down the rows of corn feeling the roundness of the tip of each ear to determine if it is ready to pick. With this weather there are so many slightly under-ripe ears that both ears feel almost identical when felt from outside the husk. Brian hopes that customers will understand if they find a slightly under-ripe ear in their dozen. The under-ripe ears are still good eating – they're just not quite as wonderfully sweet as the perfectly ripe ears.



...Story Continued Next Page.

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## Farm Profile Cont...

Another challenge of in the corn business is marketing. Supermarkets sell sweet corn at a loss (loss-leader) in order to draw customers into the store. Gillespie's corn sells for \$4/dozen while the supermarkets sell it for \$1.99/dozen—but supermarkets can't offer the 12 varieties that Gillespie's can! They grow a number of early varieties like Navaho,

Trinity, Fleet, and Tuxedo. In September there will be Honey Select Yellow, Merlin Yellow, Absolute (bi-colour) and Gourmet (bi-colour). Customers are sure to find a favorite variety. Pam thinks that yellow sweet corn is the best because it is sweet and has a real "corny" flavour. At the Gillespie's you can always choose if you want yellow or bi-colour corn. She's had customers ask if the yellow corn was actually sweet corn because they'd only ever seen bi-colour corn. Yes, it's sweet corn alright – very sweet!

The Gillespie's explain that they do not use chemicals on their produce except the sweet corn and even then they are careful to use the least amount possible. They've tried everything to avoid using chemicals but there

are no biological controls for corn borers. And as Pam puts it: "The majority of people hate to see the bugs." To avoid over spraying, the Gillespie's hire a crop specialist to come to the farm twice a week to monitor the pests and advise Brian on how much pesticide to use. The sweet corn would still be delicious and useable with a few corn borers in most ears, but Pam explains that "some of those are big ugly bugs" which most consumers today do not want to look at or remove from their corn.

Brian is the fourth generation of dairy farming Gillespie's who have lived on their farm. Instead of milk, however, they now focus on sweet corn and their farm store is open for the 6-8 weeks of sweet corn season: early July to late September with open hours 10-7 weekdays and 9-7 weekends.

The Gillespie's don't know what the future holds with possibilities of land expropriation and vandalism from neighbouring residential communities. They used to rent some neighbouring land but it has been lost to residential housing. As Brian said, "The best land we ever farmed is full of houses." But at least one of their daughters is interested in farming so maybe the Gillespie farm will see a fourth or fifth generation farmer yet.



## Our Food, Our Community

### Upcoming Events!

#### Cruickston Organics Food Workshops Series

**Canning and Drying Tomatoes:** Introduction to canning/drying. You will learn how to preserve tomatoes and bring back home a jar of salsa or tomatoes.

**Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup>**, 2:00 to 5:00pm @ St Paul church in Preston. \$20 non members, \$15 Cruickston members. Bring your own jar (2 cups size).

**Canning and Pickling vegetables:** learn how to pickle any vegetables (cucumbers, beets, carrots...). You will get a jar too. **Saturday September 25<sup>th</sup>**, 2:00 to 5:00pm @ St Paul church in Preston. \$20 non members, \$15 Cruickston members. Bring your own jar (2 cups size).

**Medicinal Herbs:** We will show you how to make a salve for healing your body and a special tea blend to heal yourself. **Tuesday October 5<sup>th</sup>**, 6:00 to 9:00 pm @ The Resource House, 768 Blair Rd. \$20 non members, \$15 Cruickston members.

**Organic and Biodynamic Farming:** Learn the principles of and some secrets about organic and what biodynamic gardening is all about. Your hosts: the manager and assistant of COAP **Tuesday October 19<sup>th</sup>**, 6:00 to 8:00 pm @ The Resource House, 768 Blair Rd. \$5 or donation. Open to the public. Come and join us for a taste of organic goodies.

To register contact: 650-9336

#### Applefest at Hergott's Cider Mill

Come on out and celebrate the apple harvest. Activities and education for the whole family. **Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup>**, 10:00 am at the Cider Mill, 928 Erb St. West, Waterloo (*Buy Local Map Listing #35*). Open to the public. Free admission

For info contact:

**Gerrie Hergott**  
885-2306

tours@hergotts.ca

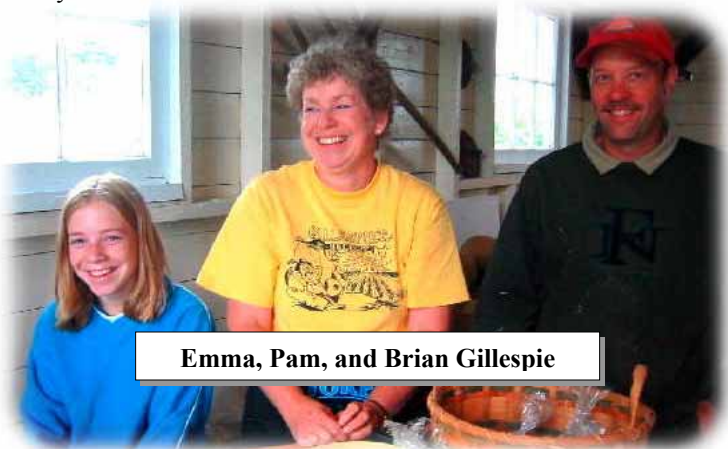
#### Oakridge Acres Fall Farm Day

Join us for a day of fun at Oakridge Acres Farm (*Buy Local Map Listing # 56*). Wide variety of activities and information celebrating agriculture and local food including animal displays and a Black Angus beef and Katahdin lamb bbq. **Saturday October 2<sup>nd</sup>**, 11:00 am – 4:00 p.m. 2132 Greenfield Rd., Ayr. Bring a non-perishable food item for the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank.

For info contact:

**Mark and Cindy Gerber**  
632-7653

oakridge@golden.net



Emma, Pam, and Brian Gillespie





*“Here’s to Ears!”*

### *The evolution of a most versatile crop*

The word corn conjures up a very familiar image of a cob of yellow kernels wrapped in a papery husk and topped off with a silk tassel. Yet, this image is a relatively modern version of an ancient wild grass called teosinte that still grows wild in the Mexican western Sierra Madre. Domestication of teosinte occurred somewhere between 4,000 and 3,000 BC in the Michoacan region, along the Pacific Ocean. Both social and plant scientists regard corn agriculture as an excellent example of a plant and human society evolving together and exerting a strong influence on one another. Modern corn did not exist naturally in the wild and had to be domesticated, sown, and protected by humans.

Likewise, the domestication of corn is strongly correlated with the development of cultural complexity in pre-Hispanic Mexico.

Corn is one of the most versatile of the world’s grains, and the only one to have originated in the Americas. The proliferation of corn around the world followed two main routes – one through North and Central America to other indigenous people, and the second through the conquering Spaniards who then introduced it to Europe and beyond. Based on archeological evidence of the Princess Point Indians, who lived along the north shore of Lake Erie, it is known that corn was being cultivated in southern Ontario as early as 500 AD.

When Europeans first began to settle in what is now Canada, they found many indigenous people tending and harvesting crops. Jacques Cartier (1535) noted large fields “covered with the corn of the country which resembles Brazil millet and is about as large as a pea.” Later in 1615, Champlain found corn being grown by the Huron Indians in the area between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay. The Hurons were particularly adept farmers working large acreages and devoting most of their energy into the “Three Sisters” - corn, beans, and squash. The three were planted together in small hills. As the corn grew straight and tall, it provided a stake around which the bean plant climbed, with the squash spreading over the earth to suppress the weeds. European settlers were quick to understand the importance of this high-carbohydrate food and corn soon became a staple in their diets.

The corn of our ancestors was, however, a starchier, less tender version of today’s corn, which falls into two main categories: sweet corn and field corn. Sweet corn, which was not widely cultivated until the mid-1800s, is harvested at an immature stage so that its kernels are tender and juicy. Field corn, on the other hand, is picked at a mature, predominantly starchy stage, dried to a more hardened state, and used in a multitude of ways. Of 10,000 items in a typical grocery store, at least 2,500 contain field corn in one form or another. Some of these products include: diapers, crayons, instant coffee and tea, toothpaste, shaving cream, ketchup, and soft drinks.



teosinte (above)  
and modern  
maize (below)



### **Corn, Health and Nutrition**

As regular readers of Local Harvest know, vegetables are a rich source of antioxidants, and corn is no exception with its high concentration of carotenoids, lutein and zeaxanthin. Like other carotenoids, these two antioxidants play a pivotal role in preventing heart disease and cancer, but recent studies have also shown that a high intake of lutein and zeaxanthin is associated with a significant reduction in the risk of cataracts and macular degeneration, a chronic eye disease. Lutein and zeaxanthin are yellow pigments found naturally in high concentrations in the macular region of the retina, the area responsible for central (as opposed to peripheral) vision. They seem to protect the eye by protecting the retinal tissue from free radical damage and by filtering high energy blue light rays that cause photo-oxidative damage.

### **Selecting Your Corn**

Check that the husks are fresh looking, tight, and green (not yellowed or dry); strip back part of the husk to see whether tightly packed rows of plump kernels fill the ear. The kernels at the tip should be smaller (large kernels at the tip are a sign of over-maturity), but still plump rather than shrunken. If you pop a kernel with your fingernail, milky juice should spurt out. The stalk of a freshly picked ear of corn will be green and moist and the silk should be moist, soft, and light golden.

Fresh corn is the best corn so try not to store it for more than a few hours. If it can’t be cooked as soon as possible after it is picked, be sure to refrigerate it the moment you get home. At room temperature, sweet corn loses its sugar six times faster than in the refrigerator, or up to half its total sugar in one day.

Leave the corn unhusked until you are ready to cook it. If you have more corn on hand than you can use within a day or two, parboil it for just a minute or two (this step stops the conversion of sugar to starch); then you can refrigerate it for up to three days. Finish the cooking process by dropping the corn into a pot of boiling water for a minute.

### **Cooking Methods**

These are two favourite ways to prepare fresh corn. Just add butter, seasoning, and enjoy!

**Boiling:** There are many schools of thought as to the best way to boil corn on the cob, but two basic rules apply: do not add salt, as it will toughen the corn; and cook the corn only long enough to tenderize it. One method is to add husked ears of corn to a pot of boiling water, cover it, and let the water return to a boil. Turn off the heat and let stand for five minutes.

**Roasting:** To roast corn in the husk, first pull back the husks so that you can remove the silk, then replace the husks and tie them with kitchen string. Soak the corn in cold water for five minutes. (If the corn is already husked, you can wrap each one in foil.) Bury the ears of corn in the hot coals of a barbecue fire, or place them on the grill and cook, turning occasionally for 15 – 20 minutes. To oven-roast corn, place the ears in a 375°F oven for 20-10 minutes.

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## Corn Varieties

According to Foodland Ontario, the province grows three types of sweet corn: normal, sugar-enhanced and supersweet. Each contains three different colour groups: yellow, bicolour (yellow-and-white) and white. Sugar content of the traditional normal type varies from 9 to 16 per cent, compared to the 14 to 44 per cent range in the others.

The natural sugars in normal and sugar-enhanced corns eventually convert to starch, causing the kernels to lose sweetness and become tough. But that doesn't happen with supersweet corn, making it particularly desirable when there's a delay between harvest and consumption. Some of the dozens of varieties grown in Ontario are Miracle, Kandy Korn, Earlyvee, Flavorvee, Escalade, Silver Queen, Phenomenal, Seneca, Vision, Navaho, Champ, Horizon and Extra Early Supersweet.



Bi-colour



Yellow

## The Myth of Peaches & Cream

For many people, "Peaches and Cream" evokes memories of the sweetest corn around. Roadside stands and supermarkets make a big deal about, and draw attention to the fact that they have "Peaches and Cream" for sale—and at the "lowest prices".

In actual fact, the name Peaches & Cream was the name given to one of the first Bi-colour varieties of sweet corn, grown in the 1970's. This variety is **generally no longer grown** having been replaced by Bi-colour varieties, such as Trinity, Sensor or Temptation, which are far superior. Today, many Bi-colour varieties are erroneously labeled Peaches and Cream.

The people who bring you the summer's best cobs know exactly what varieties they've planted. They know where it's grown and how they've grown it. Curious or concerned about your food's origin? When you see Peaches and Cream advertised as a variety, it may be a good indication the seller doesn't know where it's from either!!



## Corn Production in Waterloo Region\*



- In 2002 Waterloo Region, had 224 acres of sweet corn, 28,300 acres of fodder corn and 40,900 acres of grain corn in production.
- 11,100 acres of sweet corn were grown in Ontario (2002)
- Waterloo Region's average yield for sweet corn was 5,600 lbs per acre and it's average price was 19.4 cents per pound.
- The farm value for sweet corn was estimated at \$243,000 for Waterloo Region and \$12,500,000 for Ontario in 2002.

\*Statistics sourced from OMAF



## Did you know?

An average ear of corn has almost 800 kernels, arranged in 16 rows

## Amazing Fun With Corn

Looking for great family entertainment while you're out buying corn? Why not work up an appetite by tackling a corn maze? **Nauman's Pumpkins Galore** (BL/BF! Map Listing # 55) offers a 7-acre corn maze on their farm just south of Heidelberg. Cost to enter is \$3.00 per person or \$2.50 per person for a family of 4 or more. Time required to navigate the entire maze ranges from 20 min to an hour—depending of course, on your sense of direction! Who knows what you'll see along the way?



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## Buying local sweet corn

Who's got the corn you crave? Foodlink's 2004 Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map lists a number of producers across the Waterloo Region that grow and sell sweet corn direct to the consumer. Looking to buy the *fresh* field-ripened corn this season? The map features an extensive list of farm stands and country markets close to you.

### Edward W. Martin Farm

144 Southfield Dr., Elmira  
Tel. 699-4108 Map Listing # 48

### Solomon and Esther Martin

1183 Northfield Dr. E., West Montrose  
Tel. 664-1471 Map Listing # 50

### Martin's Family Fruit Farm

1420 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo  
Tel. 664-2750 Map Listing # 52

### Nauman's Pumpkins Galore

3250 Hessen Strasse, St. Clements  
Tel. 699-5524 Map Listing # 55

### Our Country Garden

1867 Shellard Rd., Cambridge  
Tel. 740-8120 Map Listing # 57

### R&A Harris

394 St. Charles St. East, Maryhill  
Tel. 648-3364 Map Listing # 60

### Rolling Acres Pick Your Own Farm

1235 Martin Creek Rd., Waterloo  
Tel. 664-1337 Map Listing # 61

### Shantzholm Pumpkins

1544 Bleams Rd., Petersburg  
Tel. 634-5252 Map Listing # 65

### Sittler's Produce

2535 Arthur St. North, Elmira  
Tel. 669-3549 Map Listing # 67

### J. Steckle Heritage Homestead

811 Bleams Rd., Kitchener  
Tel. 748-5719 Map Listing # 69

### Stevanus Family Farm

1082 Snyder Flats Rd., Bloomingdale  
Tel. 585-7784 Map Listing # 70

### T.J.'s Farm Fresh Produce

3010 Kossuth Rd., Cambridge  
Tel. 650-1007 Map Listing # 74

### Winroe Gardens

169 Katherine St. North, West Montrose  
Tel. 664-3501 Map Listing # 76

## Foodlink presents...



***Taste Local! Taste Fresh!***  
*A sampling of the region's best from local farmers and chefs*

**Sunday, September 26, 2004  
2:00-5:00 p.m.**

**Waterlot Restaurant and Inn  
New Hamburg**

Join us for an afternoon tasting of appetizers, prepared by teams of local chefs and farmers, showcasing the best tasting local food and farm products our region has to offer. You will be able to meet the farmers and chefs, take home the recipes, and hear the story behind the local food. Come, experience it—you will see your food in a brand new light!

### Tickets On Sale Now

**\$60** (\$30 charitable tax receipt)  
Available at:

**The Waterlot restaurant & Inn**  
17 Huron St., New Hamburg (662-2020)

**Eating Well Organically**  
104 King St. S., Waterloo (883-0734)

**Your Kitchener Store / KW Tourism**  
191 King St. W., Kitchener (745-3536)

**Herrle's Country Farm Market**  
1243 Erb's Rd., St. Agatha (886-7576)

**Taste Local! Taste Fresh!** is co-hosted with the Perth-Waterloo-Wellington chapter of Canadian Organic Growers (COG).

Ticket inquires or information contact:

**Nina Bailey-Dick**  
**(519) 578-2416**