



Local Harvest

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Features

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"On the Lamb"

Buying Lamb in
Waterloo Region



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Local Farm Profile: Ewe to You

Beth Barg was so dedicated to her 4-H sheep club that as a youngster she took a bus from Toronto to Owen Sound to attend meetings. It was her sister's marriage to a sheep farmer from Warton that got her hooked on sheep farming at age eight. From then on she spent her summers on her sister's farm learning the art and science of farming. She topped up her knowledge with a Farm Management diploma from the University of Guelph and then managed a pig farm for five years. Now she has her own farming business "Ewe to You" with a flock of 50 ewes. Beth also manages free range chickens and ducks in the summer, and a couple of beef cows.

Beth received her first sheep for Christmas in 1985. That sheep's daughter is still part of Beth's current flock at age 12 – and she's still steadily producing triplets! Beth's flock is mostly Corriedale Crosses – a breed of sheep that are dual purpose (meat and wool) but now she is shifting the flock through crossbreeding, introducing Dorsets which are more of a meat breed. While almost all breeds of sheep grow a thick coat of wool (called a fleece) each year, the fleece will vary in quality from breed to breed. The primarily wool breeds produce wool which is longer, finer and with the proper "crimp" that can be woven into top quality yarn. Although required each spring, shearing sheep is back breaking work and custom shearing can be a considerable expense to a sheep farmer. In Canada, wool prices are so low that it does not make financial sense to concentrate on wool as a money maker and farmers instead opt for heavier,



Beth Barg, Ewe to You

faster growing meat breeds. Beth does sell sheepskins from her flock which many people use for extra warmth and coziness as rugs, in baby seats, and in their beds.

With the high cost of land in Waterloo Region, Beth is currently renting pasture and a barn four kilometers from her home near Wellesley. She plans to buy a farm in the next year or two but may have to consider moving outside the region where land prices are not as expensive. Like many farmers, Beth also works off the farm. She is a Bio-Ag dealer and consultant helping farmers who want to farm more naturally.

Most of her business is through pre-ordering and demand is high as word of mouth keeps spreading. She also sells lamb to Charles' Quality Meats (another Buy Local! Buy Fresh! map member) for the Christmas and Easter markets when everyone seems to want lamb for their family feasts. Beth



explains that selling directly to the consumer is the one way a sheep farmer can get decent prices for lamb. Many people don't realize that when the U.S. border closed to Canadian beef, it also closed to Canadian lamb. This sent lamb prices in a similar tail-spin to the beef and means that the price is still lower than normal as western Canadian lamb is flooding the Ontario market.



Beth's sheep are in good hands!

Low prices aren't the only challenges facing local shepherds. One year a dog got into her flock and killed 15 sheep and wounded 18 others. After that, Beth got a llama to protect the flock. Now she has three llamas to guard the sheep flocks in their different pastures. Being a farmer who is a single woman has also been a challenge. "It is definitely a man's world," Beth says with a laugh. People often ask to speak to her husband – especially when they want to negotiate a price. She finds another lesson has been not to get attached to her sheep. When a ewe can stay productive for over 15 years its like a long-term relationship. Beth says that "It is hard to sell anything with a name." So she's learned to stop naming her sheep, she says, though it does seem that she has a name for every sheep in the flock.

Selling directly to the consumer is also an important way that Beth can communicate how her lamb differs from what you might find at stores. She's confident in the quality and wholesomeness of her product and states that she won't feed her sheep anything she herself wouldn't eat. According to Beth, the consumer looking for "all natural" lamb should exercise some caution. Some "natural or drug free" claims only indicate that the producer adhered to the minimum withdrawal period necessary to allow drugs (like antibiotics used to combat illness or infection) to clear the animal's system (and therefore the meat) before it reaches the consumer. By "natural" Beth really does mean natural: no vaccines, no hormones, no de-worming medication, no growth hormones or antibiotics. She gives her sheep a healthy GMO-free diet of grains and hay with lots of mineral supplements (and flax oil) and finds that her sheep are bigger, stronger and healthier than other sheep so they are rarely sick. If a sheep does get sick, she uses homeopathics or acupressure to speed healing. Strong sheep are important as most of her ewes give birth every eight months— often to twins or triplets.

Some may wonder why consumers prefer lamb to mutton, (what sheep meat is called as the animal reaches one year of age). Beth explains that as sheep age, the flavour of the meat becomes much stronger. Although many ethnic groups are accustomed to (and

prefer) the distinct taste of mutton, the majority of North American consumers appreciate a milder and more tender meat.

When selling lamb, holiday traditions can play a role in setting the price. "New crop" lambs (weighing between 30 and 50 lbs) are in high demand at Easter as they are the centre piece of traditional feasts, especially in the Greek and Italian communities. These lambs will often fetch premium prices in this important spring market—in fact, these smaller animals can

be worth as much as a 110 lb lamb at other times of the year! When "dressed", a 100 lb lamb will provide between 45 to 55 lbs of meat. As with beef, there are a variety of cuts to choose from including chops, roasts, a rack or even ground into "lamb burger". When buying lamb from Beth, you get to specify the cuts and then receive a selection of dinner-sized pieces ready for your freezer.

Beth confesses that it took her a few years to eat a lamb even though she was selling them to other people. When she finally did eat one of her lambs, she says it was the best meat she'd ever tasted. She has no reservations eating her lamb now. It's so good she admits: "I'll eat it everyday until it's gone!" Her favourite way to prepare lamb is using an easy marinade and then barbequing it. Just marinate the lamb pieces in lemon juice from three lemons and an equal amount of oil with six cloves of garlic crushed and ¼ t. of dried rosemary mixed in. Then after the lamb has marinated a few hours, barbeque and enjoy!

Breeds of Sheep



Corriedale



Dorset



Katahdin Hair Sheep



Canadian Arcott



North Country Cheviot



Suffolk



“On the Lamb”

The convivial story of sheep and humans goes back centuries into our past. Sheep are one of the oldest domesticated animals in the world and have provided man with meat, milk, and clothing for over 15,000 years. Today there are around 1,300 million sheep throughout the world. Most of them are domesticated, but some of them live in the wild. They are very social animals and live in groups called flocks. The domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*), a woolly ruminant, descended from the wild moufflon that is still found between the mountains of Turkey and southern Iran.

For centuries, sheep have formed the basis of pastoral agriculture. Their importance began long ago, before recorded history, when primitive man first clothed himself in the woolly skins of the wild sheep he killed for food. He had discovered a durable fabric that gave him protection from heat and cold, from wind and rain. The sheep could be milked, and, when it shed its fleece, the material could be spun and woven into cloth. Man soon real-

ized that to kill the sheep for its meat alone was a waste of food and material. And once he became a shepherd with the help of his friend the dog — probably the only animal to be domesticated before the sheep — he soon devised a method of producing clothing from the fleece.

Sheep are ruminants, which means that they have four parts to their upper digestive

tract (people only have one part, the stomach) and they chew their cud. This ability to chew, swallow, and bring back up their food allows sheep to easily digest grass and hay. Female sheep are called ewes, males are called rams, and babies are lambs. Lambs typically weigh about 9 pounds and have long tails when they are born. For the purpose of cleanliness, these tails are surgically shortened (docked) shortly after birth.

Because they have been with humans for so long, there is a long history of equating lambs and shepherds with diverse cultures and religions around the world. Judaism uses many sheep references including the Passover lamb. Christianity uses sheep-related images, such as Christ the good shepherd, or the sacrificed Lamb of God. Easter celebrations traditionally feature a meal of lamb. Sheep also have considerable importance in Islam where they are often sacrificed during Eid al-Adha, a festival that commemorates Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son to God. Herding sheep played an important historical role in all three faiths, since Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and King David all worked as shepherds. Both the Chinese and Western zodiacs feature the sheep, whether as one of the animals in the Chinese 12-year cyclical calendar, or as the symbol for the Aries sign. In both traditions, the sheep conveys particular personality traits to the person born under its influence. Many cultures also have their own versions of lion and lamb, or wolf and lamb, morality tales.



Nutrition

Lamb is a nutrient dense meat that provides an excellent source of iron, protein, zinc, niacin, and the B vitamins. To be labeled as lamb, the meat must come from sheep that are less than one year old. Lamb is a versatile meat that pairs well with many Mediterranean herbs such as mint, oregano, parley, marjoram, and rosemary. It is best served rare to medium as overcooking can diminish its flavour and texture.

In a 3oz cooked portion, the RDA is as follows:

Iron—10%	Vitamin B12—37%
Zinc—30%	Calories: 183
Riboflavin—14%	Protein: 24g
Niacin—27%	Fat: 8g

The practice of pairing lamb and wine is

quite historic. Grazing sheep and planting vineyards have, and continue to be, a Mediterranean way of life. Consuming lamb and wine together was considered so utterly natural it was almost instinctive. Lamb's flavor and texture have traditionally lent themselves to hundreds of different culinary interpretations and are, therefore, well suited to an enormous range of red and white wines from wineries around the world.

With the help of Niagara Wine Route chefs, Ontario's Lamb producers are spreading the good news that their mild-tasting, lean, high-quality product is readily available, 365 days a year, across the province. A new series of recipes developed by Niagara chefs features Ontario Lamb matched with VQA (Vintners Quality Alliance) wines. “The link between the great taste and authentic-

ity of Fresh Premium Ontario Lamb, and VQA wines that are guaranteed to be made from locally-grown grapes, makes good culinary sense”, said John Hemsted, Chair of the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency. Copies of these new recipe cards are available by calling the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency at 519 836 0043 or by visiting their website www.ontariosheep.org

Canadians, on average, consume about 1.02 kg of lamb per capita annually, up 20% in the last decade. In the province of Ontario, there are 4,200 farmers who, as of January 1, 2005, were raising 265,000 sheep and lambs. The Region of Waterloo has a combined herd of 3900 sheep and lambs. In 2003, the year of the latest statistics, Ontario farmers received \$264.71 per 100kg of live lamb.



Finding Local Lamb

Looking for the best tasting farm-fresh lamb available? Be sure and consult Foodlink's Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map for farm listings. It's usually a good idea to call ahead.

Charles Quality Meats

1448 Wilby Rd., St. Agatha Tel. 886-7931

Ewe to You

5145 Wimot-Easthope Rd., Wellesley Tel. 656-3552



Faul Farms

1180 Wrigley Rd, Ayr Tel. 632-7678

Matteas Meadows

5071 Deborah Glaister Line, Wellesley. Tel. 656-2406

Cam and Deb Schapansky

2000 Chilligo Rd, Cambridge Tel. 658-1116

Retail Cuts of Lamb



Rack of Lamb /
Crown Roast



Rack Chop



Leg of Lamb
Roast



Shoulder Chop



Boneless Sirloin
Roast



Leg Steak



Lamb Ribs



Loin Chop

Sesame Lamb Meatballs with Minted Yogurt Dip

(Serves 6)

Ingredients:

1/3 cup onions, minced	1 large egg, lightly beaten
1 clove garlic, minced	2 tbsp dried cranberries, chopped
1 1/2 tsp olive oil	1/2 cup sesame seeds, lightly toasted
1/2 tsp mint, dried, crumbled	2 cups plain yogurt
1/2 tsp salt	1/4 fresh mint leaves, chopped
1/4 tsp allspice	1/2 tsp salt
1 pinch cinnamon	
1 lb lamb shoulder, ground	
1 cup fresh breadcrumbs, finely ground	

Preparation:

In a small pan, cook onions and garlic in olive oil over moderately low heat until softened. Transfer mixture to a bowl and stir in dried mint, salt allspice and cinnamon. Add lamb, breadcrumbs, egg and cranberries and combine well. Form into 1 1/4 inch meatballs. Roll meatballs in the sesame seeds and place on baking sheet. Cook at 450° F for 8 to 10 minutes or until golden brown.

Yogurt dip

Add chopped mint to yogurt and mix well. Salt to taste and serve with meatballs.

Please refer to the reference #OSMA CIR-0020 for any inquiries on this recipe.



Did you know?

An ewe recognizes her own lamb not by sight but by its smell and the sound it makes.

Australia, China and New Zealand have the largest number of sheep and the highest production of lamb/mutton.