



# Local Harvest

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## Features

Farm Profile:  
Brubacher's Produce

Fresh in Focus:  
And the "beet" goes on

Buying Beets in  
Waterloo Region



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## Local Farm Profile: Brubacher's Produce

(2005 Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map Listing # 11)

Right now the sign at the end of the Brubacher's lane doesn't tell you everything. It lists: Tomatoes, Spanish Onions, Beets, Potatoes, Cabbage, Sweet Corn. What the sign doesn't tell you is that in their store you'll find many more just-picked super-fresh vegetables from their farm including: big bags of crisp spinach, a variety of colorful squash, huge sweet peppers, yellow pears, garlic braids, and heads of snowy white cauliflower.

Herman and Seleda Brubacher began growing vegetables to sell 15 years ago after a visit to Pennsylvania where they saw their relatives growing vegetables for market. The Brubachers started out small with just under an acre planted in vegetables that they sold on a table under a tree by their lane. Now 15 acres of their farm produces a bounty of fruits and vegetables that they sell from their farm store. As impressive as the store is in size and the selection of vegetables within, the store is dwarfed by the packing room behind it. This is where Herman and Seleda and their nine children grade and sort the vegetables and fruit. In addition to stocking their farm store, some of their produce is packed and sent to the Elmira Produce Auction Cooperative that Herman helped start in 2004.

The Elmira Produce Auction Cooperative (EPAC) is a building just north of Elmira on the corner of Reid Woods Drive and Arthur Street where you can buy wholesale-sized lots of fresh fruits and vegetables – and flowers. Herman explains that the goal of the auction is "to make a market for the small to medium sized farmers who didn't have access to markets before. Together we can attract larger buyers." Adding a few crops of fruits



*Brubacher's sign: more than meets the eye!*

and vegetables to traditional farms is important to the Old Order community because it means that their children can work on their family's farms rather than having to find work in town in order to contribute to the family income. Already the impact of the auction is visible in the additional rows of produce that you can see when you are driving around the farm roads of Woolwich Township. Another sign of the auction's influence is that more farmers are building greenhouses as a way to lengthen the growing season and speed up the ripening of the first vegetables and flowers for eager buyers who are willing to pay more for the first of the season's produce.

The auction is designed for buyers who want wholesale quantities but anyone can be a buyer.

*continued on page 2*



*Local Farm Profile continued*



Fall harvest at the famous “Kissing Bridge” near West Montrose

Some of the buyers are owners of small grocery or variety stores, some own market stands and want to offer more produce for sale than they can grow on their farm, some are restaurant owners, and some are individuals who want a large quantity of a certain crop for a specific project. Seleda gives the example of a family that bought 14 bushels of tomatoes one day to

make pasta sauce. Just think of the kinds of homemade gifts you could make if you and a few friends got together and turned a few bushels of tomatoes or sweet peppers into a gourmet delicacy.

Marketing their produce has never been a challenge for Herman and Seleda. Seleda says that when they started selling vegetables, “More people came than we ever expected.” Living close to highway 86 helps bring in customers who see their farm’s sign, but Herman thinks the interest in their vegetables comes from a growing interest in fresh and local food. “Fresh food is getting a lot of promotion now because it tastes better,” Herman explains. “Food that is picked fresh has a lot better flavour than food that is picked for

shipping.” Herman holds up a tomato as an example of produce that was picked fresh and ripe from his farm a few hours ago but if a tomato is picked far away and shipped, it has to be picked under-ripe so that it won’t rot enroute to the store. Herman explains that when a tomato is picked ripe, it has more nutrients than if it was picked immature. The Brubachers pick their produce fresh every day of the summer except for Sundays and their store is open everyday except Sunday 9AM-7PM, June through October. So whether you’re looking for beets or onions or squash, the Brubachers can sell you them in large or small quantities. The Brubachers grow a lot of everything. For example, Herman estimates that they harvest 400 bushels of onions a season.

Though the Brubachers are probably known best for their watermelons, they also grow beautiful red beets. Planting beets throughout the summer means that they harvest and sell fresh, young beets all season. The big beets that ripen in September and October are the best for storage. Herman advises putting these big beets in a cool dry place (like a basement) and they will keep until February. Another way to store and enjoy beets all Winter is to pickle them as Seleda does. The Brubacher family likes to eat fresh beets with just butter and salt AND they like them in cake (see Vegetable Cake recipe on page 4). Herman also enjoys the leaves of beets (called beet greens) sauted with butter and salt.

You can combine a stop at Brubacher’s Produce with a picnic at Ontario’s only remaining covered bridge – just a few kilometers away in West Montrose. Pick up a watermelon or two at Brubachers and then eat them in West Montrose while spitting the seeds in the Grand River as you watch it flow under the beautiful old red bridge. Or take the opportunity now to stock up on onions, squash, beets, garlic and potatoes at the Brubachers and feel free to pet the horses before you head home. 🐾



## Finding Local Beets

If you’re looking for beets, Foodlink’s Buy Local! Buy Fresh! map features a number of farms that grow and sell them. Be sure and consult the map for more details and enjoy the fall countryside while you’re at it! It’s usually a good idea to call ahead.



**Joel Bauman**  
1764 King St. N. St. Jacobs  
Tel. 664-3093



**Gillespie’s Garden**  
1043 Brantford Hwy. (Hwy. 24 S.)  
Cambridge  
Tel. 622-2294



**Stevanus Family Farm**  
1082 Snyder’s Flats Rd.,  
Bloomingdale  
Tel. 585-7784



**Brubacher’s Produce**  
1562 Halm Rd., West Montrose  
Tel. 664-3214



**Herle’s Country Farm Market**  
1243 Erb’s Rd., St. Agatha  
Tel. 886-7576



**Weber’s Family Farm**  
2844 Lobsinger Line, St. Clements  
Tel. 699-6025



**Floralane Produce**  
2191 Arthur St., Elmira  
Tel. 669-3167



**Clarence and Edna Knorr**  
2477 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo  
Tel. 699-4007



**Sidney Wideman**  
3969 Ament Line, Wallenstein  
Tel. 698-9918





## And the “beet” goes on

Novelist Tom Robbins writes on beets: “The beet is the most intense of vegetables. The radish, admittedly, is more feverish, but the fire of the radish is a cold fire, the fire of discontent, not of passion. Tomatoes are lusty enough, yet there runs through tomatoes an undercurrent of frivolity. Beets are deadly serious.”

It would be difficult to find many similarities between ancient Greek and Russian cultures, but one commonality was their devoted passion for *beta vulgaris*, or the common red beet. Long before borscht graced the tables of Russian and Slavic households, Aphrodite’s beauty, mysticism, and aphrodisiac qualities were being attributed to beet root. The wild beet, the ancestor of the beet with which we are familiar today, is thought to have originated in prehistoric times in North Africa and grew wild along Asian and European seashores. The Greeks and Romans, in fact, ate only the leaves, mostly for medical reasons. Only in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD did epicures pronounce it delicious.

Columella, one of the world’s first food writers, claims that the beet got its original name, beta, because of its resemblance to the second letter of the alphabet. Early Russian homeopaths claimed the beet could cure tuberculosis, scurvy, and toothache, while Russian peasants believed it worked as an insecticide. Russian beauties, both peasants and ladies in high society, used the beet as a rouge for their cheeks. By doing so, they could attract the opposite sex and repel mosquitoes at the same time!

It is likely that it was from Germany that the beet root spread through Europe. By the 17th century, the beet had been introduced to England, via Italy and France. All of the 17th and 18th century beets were shaped like turnips or parsnips. The modern round root was not yet known. The preferred beet in the 17th and early 18th century had red leaves as well as red roots. By 1754, Philip Miller recorded in *The Gardeners Dictionary* that there was a type of the common



red beet; “which has been introduced lately into the Kitchen-gardens with a short Top, and green Leaves, with a very red Root: this is preferred to the common red Beet.” This may refer to the early introduction of the Early Blood Turnip Beet, which was subsequently brought to North America at the beginning of the 19th century. Thereafter, the beet became one of the most common root crops in America. William Cobbett writes in *The American Gardener* (1821); “This vegetable, which is little used in England, is here in as common use as carrots are there.”

Until the twentieth century, the most popular vegetables to grow were those that were the best for storing—by drying, pickling, or preserving in the root cellar. In *The Vegetable Garden* of 1885, readers were advised to dig up the beetroots by the end of October, build them into “pyramidal-shaped clumps,” and cover them with straw and earth for the winter. A root that preserved intact its firm texture and extraordinary sweetness was invaluable as winter food for man and beast. However, the fact that cows liked beets did not improve their status on the dinner table.

Beets’ value grew in the 19th century when it was discovered that one particular variety could be processed into a concentrated source of sugar, and in 1806 the first sugar factory was built in Germany. When access to sugar cane was restricted by the British,

Napoleon decreed that the beet be used as the primary source of sugar, catalyzing its popularity. Ultimately, this resulted in the ability to satisfy, on a worldwide basis, the basic human craving for sugar.

### Nutrition

Beets’ sweet taste reflects their high sugar content, yet belies their low calorie count. Raw beet roots have a hard, crunchy texture that turns soft and buttery when they are cooked. Beet leaves have a lively, bitter taste similar to chard. The main ingredient in the traditional eastern European soup, borscht, beets are delicious eaten raw, but are more typically cooked or pickled.

Beets are particularly rich in folate, which have been found to prevent neural-tube birth defects and aid in the fight against heart disease and anemia. Just one cup of boiled, sliced beets contains 136 micrograms of folate—34% of the daily requirement.

Beets are also high in fiber, both soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fiber helps to keep your intestinal track running smoothly and soluble fiber helps to keep your blood sugar and blood cholesterol levels on track.

The pigment that gives beets their rich, purple-crimson color—betacyanin—is also a powerful cancer-fighting agent. There are other breeds of beetroot that have orange, yellow, white and striped flesh. These have



a greater or lesser distribution of the two betalin pigments, betacyanin and betaxanthin. The pigments are contained in cells that are quite unstable and will therefore 'leak' when cut, heated, and placed in contact with air or sunlight. If the skin is left on when cooking, however, the integrity of the cells will be maintained and leakage minimized. The pigment stabilizes in acid conditions, which is a good reason why beetroot is often pickled. In the United States, it is the traditional colorant for pink lemonade.



Cook trimmed, unpeeled beets in a large pot of boiling water for 45 minutes for medium to large beets, 30 minutes for baby beets. When cool enough to handle, slip the skins off. Smaller, younger beets may be so tender that peeling won't be needed after they are cooked. Trimmed, unpeeled beets may be baked at 300 degrees in a covered pan until tender (one hour for baby beets, 1 1/2 hours for large beets). Or, they can be quickly finished in a hot oven, tossed with pan juices from a roast.

### Nutrition Facts (1 cup cooked, sliced)

Calories 31	Potassium 259 mg
Protein 1.5 g	Phosphorus 32 mg
Carbohydrate 8.5 g	Folate 136 mcg
Dietary Fiber 1.5 g	Vitamin A 58.5 IU

### Buying and Storing

Although beets are available year round, they are at their peak from June through to October. Look for firm, small to medium-size beets (up to 3 inches in diameter). The outside may be rough, but should be dry and taut. Beets can be stored unwashed in the refrigerator crisper where they will keep for two to four weeks. They can also be kept in a root cellar or other cool location. Leaving about two inches of the stem attached will prevent the roots from "bleeding." Store the unwashed greens in a separate perforated plastic bag where they will keep fresh for about four days.

### Preparation of Beets

**Equivalents:** Five 2 1/2-inch beets = 1 pound  
1 pound = 2 1/2 cups, cooked

Don't peel beets until after cooking. When bruised or pierced, beets bleed, losing some of their vibrant color and turning a duller brownish red. To minimize bleeding, wash beets gently under cool running water, taking care not to tear the skin—this tough outer layer helps keep most of beets' pigments inside the vegetable. To prevent bleeding when boiling beets, leave them whole with their root ends and one inch of stem attached.

Beets' color can be modified during cooking. Adding an acidic ingredient such as lemon juice or vinegar will brighten the color while an alkaline substance such as baking soda will often cause them to turn a deeper purple. Salt will blunt beets' color, so add only at the end of cooking if needed.

Since beet juice can stain your skin, wearing kitchen gloves is a good idea when handling beets. If your hands become stained during the cleaning and cooking process, simply rubbing some lemon juice on them will remove the stain.

Cooked beets are tasty in cold salads with vinaigrette, mayonnaise or Greek skorthalia (a purée of mashed potato, garlic, olive oil and lemon juice). Beets pair nicely with a blue or feta cheese and nuts—especially walnuts or hazelnuts. Olive oil or walnut oil, vinegar (balsamic or red wine), and orange juice are always nice as a dressing, with additions of orange zest, dill, black pepper, coarse salt, and of course sour cream. Beets can be cooked whole in some orange juice and water, with the resulting stock added to olive oil for an easy salad dressing. Simply grate raw beets for a delicious and colorful addition to salads or decorative garnish for soups.

The greens can be substituted in any recipe that calls for swiss chard, kale, or spinach.

Raw beets do not freeze well since they tend to become soft upon thawing. Freezing cooked beets is fine.

### Vegetable Cake

*A favourite recipe provided by Seleda Brubacher.*

#### Ingredients:

1 cup Mazola oil or 1/2 cup lard	1/2 cup raw, finely shredded carrots
1 1/2 cup sugar	2 cups flour
3 egg yolks	2 tsp. baking powder
2 tbsp. hot water	1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla	1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 cup raw, finely shredded beets	3 stiffly beaten egg whites
	1 cup chopped nuts (optional)

#### Preparation:

Beat oil (or lard), sugar, egg yolks, water and vanilla together until light and fluffy. Mix in beets and carrots. Add dry ingredients. Fold in egg whites last. Pour into a greased pan and bake for 30-35 minutes at 350 degrees F.

Enjoy!