



Local Harvest

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Local Farm Profile: Floralane Produce

(2006 Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map Listing #38)

If you're looking for fresh local produce this summer, you should really stop by the farm stand at Floralane Produce. Just a couple of minutes North of Elmira, Stuart and Esther Horst have built a thriving business selling their own fresh picked veggies, sweet corn, berries and flowers. The attractive, newly built farm stand with its bright red roof has become a bit of a landmark for locals who appreciate real country freshness. There's the crisp lettuce and spinach, seemingly perfect cauliflowers, colourful yellow beans and, of course, Floralane's specialty—beefsteak and grape tomatoes—bursting with flavour and the fast becoming the "pride of Elmira".

It's hard to believe that the Horst family has only been in the produce business for a few years. Fluctuating cattle prices and the BSE crisis in particular got Stuart thinking about the future, and he decided to give the produce business a try. The first year, Stuart and Esther sold their garden vegetables from the front porch. Back then, the roadside sign advertised beets, raspberries and apples from their small orchard near the road. They were also able to sell quite a few tomatoes mostly grown by a neighbour. That first year, customers came and so did the idea that the family could get into produce on a larger scale. They sold the herd and Stuart swapped the milking stool for a garden hoe.

Now, just a few short years later, Floralane Produce is flourishing as one of Woolwich township's fine on-farm produce markets. To supply the produce stand, the garden patch has now "grown" into nearly 18 acres of vegetables,



Floralane produce—home to summer freshness



A floral welcome

herbs and flowers. They have also gone into tomatoes in a big way, having just built five new greenhouses last year. The 18,000 square ft. (ap-

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Local Farm Profile continued

proximately half an acre) of greenhouse space is growing close to 5,000 tomato plants. Stuart estimates that each of his beefsteak tomato vines can produce upwards of 16 kilos of fruit per season. Having the greenhouses also means a season that extends well beyond that of tomatoes growing in the field. This year's vines arrived as small seedlings in mid-February. Established in the greenhouse with the proper irrigation and nutrients the tomato vines are reaching lengths of 20 feet! The Horsts started picking the first fruit at the end of April and the harvest may well extend up until Christmas. Right now they're picking tomatoes every second day and volumes are such that they sell many flats of tomatoes at the Elmira Produce Auction and to other wholesale purchasers including local grocery stores and some restaurants.



The Horst family knows quality vegetables—inside and out!

The greenhouse operation and the wholesale tomato business certainly adds a level of complexity to the farm, however Stuart believes that one of the keys to success might just be diversity. As he puts it, *"we grow a little of a lot"*. With 18 acres though, this may be a bit of a modest understatement. At any rate, the wholesale and retail sales complement each other. Having a good variety of vegetable crops is not only more appealing to the customer, it also provides a bit of insurance should one of the crops under perform or fail altogether. While its good not to have all your eggs (or tomatoes for that matter) in one basket, all this diversity also means a whole pile of work—in the field and greenhouses, in packaging product and time spent in managing the retail side of things. Thankfully, this is a welcome circumstance as the Horsts are able to enlist support from their family. A few of the older of their 8 children have already started to help out and are now taking more "specialized" responsibilities such as "being in charge of the potted mums". Esther is a natural people person so she manages the store, working with customers and overseeing any extra staff.

Stuart's dad also helps out with the business side of things, with bookkeeping and accounts. In all, there's no shortage of work to be done and everyone is kept busy. Produce may indeed be a more promising farm industry than cattle for farmers like Stuart and Esther, however it is clearly a labour intensive pursuit. If you haven't grown up on a farm or even had your own vegetable patch, it might be difficult to appreciate just how much effort goes into growing quality produce. Planting, watering, weeding (and more weeding), harvesting, packaging, selling... the list goes on.

In talking with Stuart, it's easy to see he's encouraged, (and possibly excited) about the future of the business. The shift to produce hasn't been easy and has required considerable investment on the family's part. Building relationships with customers, whether they purchase 1 pint of grape tomatoes or 1,000 pints also takes time—however customers can certainly be assured of the care and attention to detail that the Horst family puts into the growing of their food. When you purchase Floralane's harvest offerings, you may not necessarily taste the effort that goes into family farming. When you bite into one of their sweet grape tomatoes however, there's no mistaking the unsurpassable freshness and flavour. Grown with pride in Elmira! 🍅



Finding Locally Grown Spinach in Waterloo Region

If you're looking for spinach why not consult Foodlink's Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. The 2006 edition features a number of farms close by that grow and sell it.



Unfactory Farm
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Gmach Produce
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Brubacher Produce
1562 Halm Rd., West Montrose
Tel. 519-664-3214



Floralane Produce
2191 Arthur St. North, Elmira
Tel. 519- 669-3167



Herrle's Country Farm Market
1243 Erb's Rd., St. Agatha
Tel. 519-886-7576



Pfennings Organic Vegetables Inc.
1209 Waterloo St., Baden
Tel. 519-662-3460



Rare Organics
1679 Blair Rd., Blair
Tel. 650-9336

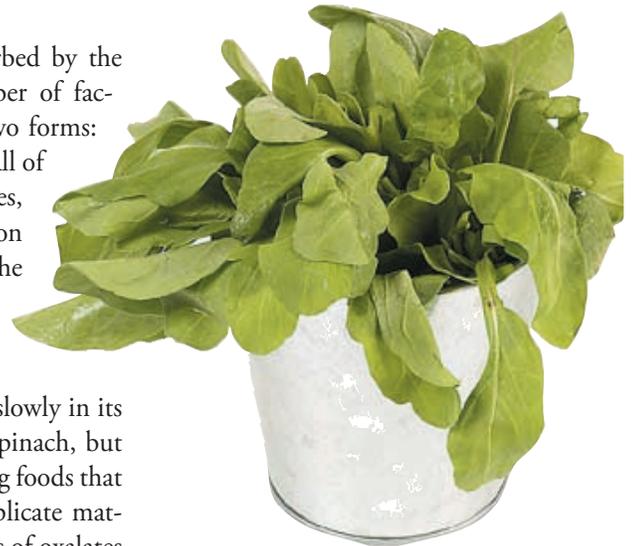


The Spin on Spinach

Any one of a certain age is likely to identify spinach with the 1920s cartoon character, Popeye the Sailor Man. In the first half of the last century, spinach was commonly sold in cans and many children who were faced with a blob of the dark, bitter vegetable on their dinner plate probably forever banned it from their diets as adults. So why did Popeye find it so appetizing? The creator of this comic strip, E.C. Segar was a vegetarian and as a way of promoting the benefits of vegetables, he boosted his character's strength with a known iron-rich food.

What Segar didn't know was that, while spinach does contain a relatively high level of iron for a vegetable, we are not able to absorb it all through our human intestines.

The ability of iron to be absorbed by the body is dependant on a number of factors. Iron enters the body in two forms: nonheme iron and heme iron. All of the iron in grains and vegetables, and about three fifths of the iron in meat, is nonheme iron. The remaining 2/5 of meat iron is in the heme form that is easily absorbed. Nonheme iron, on the other hand, is absorbed slowly in its many food sources, including spinach, but it can be improved by consuming foods that are rich in vitamin C. To complicate matters, spinach contains high levels of oxalates that bind to iron and calcium causing these minerals to be expelled from the body.



other diseases at the same time.

There are 4 basic types of spinach:

- **Savoy:** the stuff of Popeye's dreams, it has dark green crinkly, curly leaves, with a springy texture and a bitter taste. It is most often sold fresh in bunches.
- **Flat leaf:** flat with spade-shaped leaves and a milder flavour than savoy. It is perfect for salads, soups, and baby foods.
- **Semi-savoy:** a hybrid of savoy with the same texture but less bitterness.
- **Baby:** the smallest leaves of flat leaf have a mild, almost sweet flavour and are often washed and prepackaged for salads.

Purchasing

Spinach can be bought loosely or in prepackaged bags. You can get better quality when you buy loosely, because you can examine all the leaves. When examining the leaves, pick the ones that are smaller and have a good green color to them. Leaves that are crisp and spongy are of good quality. Do not pick leaves that are wilting, brown or yellow. Fresh spinach should smell sweet, never sour or musty. Look for stems that are fairly thin and coarse. Thick stems indicate overgrown spinach, which may be leathery

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While the iron myth may have been disproven, this multipurpose vegetable originating in southwest Asia still has extraordinary nutritional value, especially when fresh, steamed, or quickly boiled. It is a good source of vitamins A, C, and E, several vital antioxidants, and folic acid. The vitamin K provided by spinach - almost 200% of the Daily Value in one cup of fresh spinach - is important for maintaining bone health. So, we can conclude that while Popeye must have made himself super strong by spritzing lemon juice over his spinach, or by supplementing his diet with other high vitamin C foods like orange juice, he was also protecting himself against osteoporosis, heart disease, colon cancer, arthritis, and



and bitter. If only bagged spinach is available where you shop, check whether the contents seem resilient when you squeeze the bag.

Storage

If stored for more than a few days, spinach loses much of its nutritional value. While refrigeration slows this effect to about eight days, spinach will lose most of its folate and carotenoid content. This is worth considering when purchasing spinach out of season. Other than prepackaged baby spinach, fresh spinach should be cleaned thoroughly and then stored loosely in an unsealed bag in the crisper tray of the refrigerator for a few days.

One cup of baby spinach looks like a lot but once cooked the leaves will reduce to about 1 cup, losing roughly 80 to 90% of its volume. Calculate on ½ cup cooked spinach or 1 cup fresh leaves per person.

Spinach Power

While Popeye once powered his muscles with spinach, today researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have been working on a process that would convert organic energy from spinach into a solid-state solar cell small enough and strong enough to power cell phones and lap tops. Plants have the unique ability to convert sunlight into energy through a process called photosynthesis. Spinach is the preferred plant of choice as it produces a lot of energy relative to its weight and size. By combining biological and non-biological devices, the MIT researchers have created a “spinach sandwich” that is powered with spinach protein complexes. The full article can be read at: <http://www.mit.edu/newsoffice/2004/spinach-0915.html> 



Taste Local! Taste Fresh!
Join us to celebrate the local harvest!
Come, meet the farmers who grow our food
and sample tasty creations from the region's
finest chefs and restaurants!

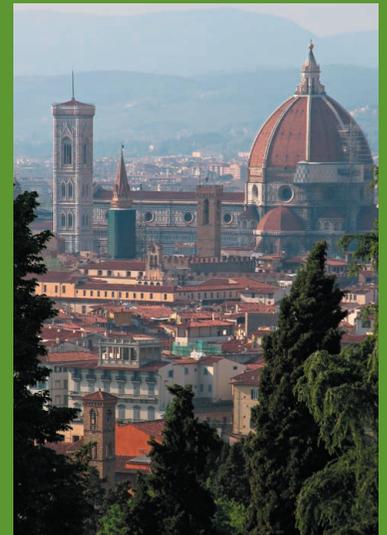
Sunday September 17th, 2006
2-5 pm at
J.Steckle Heritage Homestead
811 Bleams Rd., Kitchener
Tickets \$55/person

For more information or to order tickets please
visit our website www.foodlink.ca
Tel. 519.524.2906
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Spinach Trivia:

In the 16th century, Catherine de Medici left her home of Florence, Italy, to marry the king of France. She brought her own cooks, who could prepare spinach the way she liked—since then, dishes prepared on a bed of spinach are referred to as “a la Florentine”.

Spinach was used by medieval artists to produce a green pigment for illuminated manuscripts. It is one of the few non-toxic natural green pigments, and is still used today as body paint.



Sumptuous Shallot Spinach

This zesty dish converts everyone into a spinach lover! It's also an excellent complement to grilled rainbow trout.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp finely chopped local shallots
- 1 large bunch “Floralane Spinach”
- 1 tsp butter
- ¼ cup sour cream or plain yoghurt
- 2 tsp fresh squeezed lemon juice
- Generous pinch of salt

Preparation:

Sauté shallots in butter for 2 minutes. Stir in spinach and sour cream, lemon juice and salt. Continue cooking, uncovered, stirring often just until spinach is hot.

Serves 2

