



Local Harvest

Foodlink Waterloo Region • Issue 23 • October 2006

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Local Farm Profile: Junel Holsteins: The Unfactory Farm

(2006 Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map Listings #5)

What's in a name? Well, for Nelson and June Gerber of Crosshill, the name of their farm-business pretty much sums up everything. 15 years ago when they were getting some business cards made up, they took the opportunity to create a marketing name as well. At the time, many neighbouring farms were getting larger and their production systems more complicated. In a nutshell, the economics of farming was leaving farm families with a tough choice – either keep up or be left behind. Larger, more specialized operations – referred to by some as “factory farms” – were replacing the traditional, family farm. This would not be the path the Nelson and June would chose for their farm or family, so their 100 acres on Streicher Line was re-christened Junel Holsteins and the “Unfactory Farm” – reflecting their desire to keep farming and the food they produced as simple as possible. As best they can, they take a natural approach. The result? Farm products as wholesome as they are fresh. As June points out, their business strategy is essentially “to produce quality food with integrity and sell nothing we don't eat ourselves”.

Although they have a large family with seven children, you can rest assured there's still plenty of good wholesome product left for sale. You can order their organic freezer beef by the side, quarter or individual cut. There's a good selection of all-beef, nitrate free summer sausage, kolbassa, wieners or pepperettes. They do batches of turkeys ready for your Thanksgiving or Christmas feast, sell fresh eggs, un-pasteur-



Selling at the market is a family affair

ized honey, locally made apple butter and maple syrup and “Millbank” Organic Cheese. Over the summer they grow a wide variety of garden produce and herbs and have plenty of root vegetables including carrots, potatoes, onions and beets available throughout the winter.

One of their best sellers this fall was an organic mesclun mix. June's mix of fresh garden greens was a real hit with customers looking for a “new spin on salad”. A special mix of some heirloom lettuce varieties, spinach and a variety of beet

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Local Farm Profile continued



Farm freshness is waiting for you

greens called “Bull’s Blood” for colour, the tender leaves together offer a real variety of flavours! Discerning salad enthusiasts might have noticed the absence of Arugula from the combo. June finds it more difficult to grow organically as it attracts certain insects and must stay covered. The Unfactory Farm mesclun patch is also seeded continuously so that she’ll have a good supply of this popular salad mix throughout the spring, summer and late into the fall—as long as the weather doesn’t get too hot or dry.

The Gerbers sell some of their products to a few specialty stores in Kitchener-Waterloo (Eating Well Organically on King St. and Full Circle Foods) and their organic milk goes to Organic Meadow dairy (and can be found in many local grocery stores). They also sell from the farm-gate by appointment only. The bulk of their business though, is at the Kitchener Market where the Unfactory Farm stall is a fixture on Saturday mornings throughout the year. Although they themselves have only been selling as vendors at the market for the past few years, there’s a family connection as Nelson and June took over the market stall from June’s parents Mahlon and Mary Roth. Rothdale Farms was a Kitchener market mainstay, selling produce and other farm products (including Mahlon’s hand-crafted, solid-wood rolling pins) for decades before they finally retired. In fact, Mary and Mahlon were the second longest serving vendors at the Kitchener Market at the time it moved to its new location at 300 King Street. Just talk about tradition!

June Gerber’s no stranger to dealing with the market crowds and customers as she accompanied her parents to market each week as a young girl. At the time, she didn’t think she’d make a career of being a farmer at the market. “It’s a lot of work for farmers’ to sell at the farmers’ market” says June. “Some people don’t realize the extra investment and effort that farmers make to be there with their farm fresh products”. Renting the stall, licenses and

insurance along with the cost of transporting the products to the market (no small expense given the rising price of gas) are all costs handled by the farmer-vendor. Then there’s the time spent in the wee hours of the morning (or late the evening before) picking crops, packing the bushels, boxes and baskets, getting the stand ready and finally the day of selling. Its work that the average consumer might not have thought about when its time to pay for their carrots, peppers or eggs!

For June though, and farmer-vendors like her, the direct interaction with their customers makes the added effort worth it. Being at the market is truly a chance for the farmer to do real product promotion and even customer research! “We like to talk to customers and tell them about our products”. June feels a small, diversified farm has more to offer the customer in terms of quality assurance. This is especially important to people these days as the average consumer is largely “disconnected” from his or her food. June notices more than ever that people want to make healthy choices and some customers—perhaps those with allergies or small children may also opt for organic alternatives. According to her, although people want organic product, there’s still a lot of work to do to educate consumers on what organic really means. What are the standards? How is the product different? Why should there be price premiums for organics? Consumers buying organic need to be careful about products that claim to be “organically or naturally grown”. It doesn’t necessarily mean that the product in question is organic. The Unfactory Farm has been completely OCPP (Organic Crop Producers and Processors) certified organic for the past three years. Certification is still your best indication that food is produced in adherence to organic principles. “Its all educating and being educated” says June. “We’re always learning new things and making new friends. At the end of the day we want to assist our customers in making wise choices about their diets and lifestyles which may benefit their health.”

When you visit the Unfactory Farm stall you’ll have the satisfaction of dealing with a family owned business that’s part of your community. If you stop and talk to Nelson, June or their children, they’ll be happy to any share information you might want about their farm and the quality, farm fresh food products they sell. Isn’t this one of the best reasons to buy from a local farm? Got questions about your food? Ask the farmer that grew it!... or so the saying goes. This Saturday morning, why not do stop by Unfactory Farm stall at Your Kitchener Market? Pick up your groceries and feel free to bring your questions.

For further farm or product information contact Nelson or June Gerber at (519) 656-2691. 5415 Streicher Line, Crosshill Ontario. The Unfactory Farm stall is located at the bottom of the stairs, indoors at Your Kitchener Market (300 King St. East) every Saturday throughout the year. Saturday Market hours are 7am to 4pm.



Salad Days

It was not long ago in North America when a good salad was thought to be a wedge of iceberg lettuce, a few slices of tomato and healthy dollop of Thousand Islands dressing. Thanks to increased recognition of the nutritional value of greens and a desire to replicate European cuisine in our own kitchens, the North American palate has woken up to the rich flavour and texture of mesclun. Whether known as spring mix or salad greens, mesclun is simply a blend of lettuces, herbs and tender young greens generally used for salads. The term

mesclun originates from the latin, *misculāre*, meaning to mix thoroughly, and if properly mixed should combine four distinct tastes.

The mild flavor comes from the many varieties of leaf or Bibb lettuce, corn salad, and lollo rosso. The piquant taste is characteristic of mustard greens. The bitter or tart flavor originates with radicchio, escarole, mizuna or curly endive. And the peppery, spicy accents are expressions of arugula, tot soi or watercress. Some other ingredients that add zest and flavor to a mesclun salad mix are oak leaf, sorrel, parsley, basil, chives, fennel, celery leaf, purslane, and dandelion greens.

And to ensure that the salad has a proper presentation, there should be a good mix of leaf textures (smooth, frizzy, ruffled) and colours (light and dark green, white, purple and red). Edible floral garnishes – the flowers of borage, garlic chives, nasturtium, pansy, anise-hyssop, chrysanthemum, fennel or marigold – help to enliven the appearance.

Despite the reference to springtime, mes-



clun is grown throughout the summer and into early fall, and is available year round in the supermarket. The benefit of these vegetables is that they grow in cool weather and do not require full, summer sunlight. This makes them a perfect crop to sow in early spring, in shadier sections of the summer vegetable garden and also in August for a fall crop, as they are unaffected by mild frost. Mesclun can also be grown indoors in winter on a sunny windowsill or under lights, though the leaves will be thinner and more delicate.

Mesclun is one of the first crops that can be sowed. Premixed mesclun seed packets are available, or you can mix your own from the suggested plants above. To plant a mesclun bed, use rich tilled garden soil located in full sun (eight to 10 hours per day). A large pot, at least a foot in diameter, also makes a good salad bed. Seeds should be planted in furrows no deeper than 1/4 inch. Seedlings on the surface of the soil tend to dry out quickly, especially if there isn't the required one inch of rainfall per week. Water lightly every other day to keep them moist. A high nitrogen fertilizer is necessary only after the first harvest.

When a plant is four to six inches tall, cut the leaves one inch from the base. The plant will then sprout new leaves that can



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be clipped up to three more times. This method of harvesting is referred to as a “cut-and-come-again” technique. Another harvesting technique is to stagger the sowing of the seeds every one to two weeks. After only four weeks, harvesting can begin.

Nutrition

Depending on the particular greens it includes, each batch of mesclun has a slightly different nutritional composition. In general, mesclun is nutritionally similar to romaine lettuce, substantially higher in vitamin A (beta-carotene), vitamin C, and folate than pale iceberg lettuce, but less loaded with these nutrients than raw spinach. One serving of mesclun (128g) contains approximately 3g of fibre, 3g protein, 0g fat, and provides 35 calories.

A good reason to eat mesclun is for the variety of colours that provide an array of different phytonutrients. For example, different salad greens offer distinct flavonoid phytonutrients. Green leaf varieties have the flavonoid called *quercetin*, but you’ll need red leaves to get any of the flavonoids called *cyandinins*. To get good supplies of *kaempferol*, you may want to include some endive. Researchers are continually learning about different ways in which these flavonoids and pigments help prevent disease.

Handling and Preparation

Mesclun is perishable, so buy it absolutely fresh. It should be richly coloured, with no browning or wilting. Refrigerate unwashed leaves for up to 3 days in slightly damp paper towels in a plastic bag or box. To remove any grit, rinse in cold water and spin until dry. *Simply in Season*, a Mennonite Central Committee cookbook, recommends placing the rinsed greens in a clean pillowcase and swinging it around outdoors until the leaves are dry. Now, that’s fresh!

Don’t overwhelm these delicate leaves with over seasoned, heavy store-bought dressings. The appeal of mesclun is in the texture and flavour of the individual leaves. 

Mesclun salad with radishes, avocado and blood oranges

Ingredients: Salad

- 2 small blood oranges or other oranges
- 6 cups Unfactory Farm mesclun mix
- 4 red radishes, trimmed and very thinly sliced
- 1/2 small avocado, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons crumbled blue cheese

Ingredients: Vinagrette

- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- ½ tsp Dijon mustard
- a pinch of salt and fresh black pepper
- 5 tablespoons virgin olive oil

Preparation:

In a glass jar with lid, combine vinegar with mustard, a pinch of salt and fresh black pepper. Combine well and add olive oil. Shake the jar until the dressing is thoroughly emulsified. In a large bowl, combine the mesclun, radish slices and orange sections. Pour the vinaigrette over the salad and toss gently to mix. To serve, divide the salad among individual plates and top each portion with slices of avocado and sprinkle with cheese. Serves 6.



Finding Local Salad Greens

If you’re looking for salad greens why not consult Foodlink’s Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. The 2006 edition features a number of farms, CSAs and farmers’ market vendors that grow lettuce, spinach and greens in season.

 **Unfactory Farm**
(Kitchener Market)
5415 Streicher Line, Crosshill
Tel. 519- 656-2691

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

 **Knorr’s Fruits & Vegetables**
2477 Lobsinger Line
Waterloo
Tel. 519- 669-4007

 **Diversity Gardens (CSA)**
1528 Notre Dame. St. Agatha
Tel. 519- 885-8775

 **Brubacher Produce**
1562 Halm Rd., West Montrose
Tel. 519-664-3214

 **Aberle Farms (CSA)**
2639 Northfield Dr. E., Elmira
Tel. 519-669-2097

 **Gmach Produce**
(Kitchener Market)
1381 Huron Rd, New Dundee
Tel. 519- 894-1834

 **Floralane Produce**
2191 Arthur St. N., Elmira
Tel. 519-669-3154

 **Solomon S. Martin**
1183 Northfield Drive East
West Montrose
Tel. 519-664-1471

