



Local Harvest

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Features

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Pears in Waterloo
Region



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Local Farm Profile: Martin's Family Fruit Farm

While Martin's is perhaps best known for their apples and commitment to serving the local community, there is a whole lot more to this family-owned farm than what first meets the eye.

The handsome farm, situated on Lobsingner Line in Woolwich Township, has been in the Martin family since 1820, but it was only in 1971 that the first 100 fruit trees were planted. Steve Martin recounts the serendipitous way in which this came about. Up until the sixties the Martins were hog farmers, who, from time to time took in MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) students from abroad. In 1969 Steve's dad Leighton employed a young man named Bronco from Yugoslavia. Although Bronco worked on the Martin's hog farm, his training was in orchards and vineyards. Somehow, he convinced Leighton Martin to consider growing apples and together they planted the first fruit trees the following season. Each year additional trees were planted and by the mid seventies the trees were beginning to produce in hefty quantities. The family began selling these apples at the Waterloo and St. Jacobs market in 1977. To keep pace with the growing demand Leighton began to source additional apples from Simcoe and Leamington. By this time it was clear that storage and packing facilities would need to be built. From 1980 to 1996 four phases of additions were built on the Martin property.



Brothers Steve, Kevin and Ken Martin proudly display Anjou pears grown at Martin's Family Fruit Farm.

Today, Martins owns over 800 acres of orchards located in Waterloo as well as other locations throughout the province. This makes them one of Canada's largest producers of apples. In addition they have won a Business Excellence Award for their commitment to environmental sustainability and are well known for their state-of-the-art facilities. Despite this notoriety, Martin's Family Fruit Farm continues its local connections and from the beginning has been a strong advocate of Foodlink's *Buy Local Buy Fresh* campaign. Steve, himself, is a member of Foodlink's Board of Directors, and has a keen interest in local food issues, speaking and writing regularly on this topic.



Local Food Profile continued

Steve, along with his brothers, Kevin and Ken run the business. Kevin is the president and Ken is in charge of production while Steve manages the retail end of things. Their father Leighton also continues to be involved in the management of the orchards.

Martin's Family Fruit Farm is unique in that "we are vertically integrated" says Steve, explaining that they handle each stage of growing, storing, packing shipping and distributing their products. Their controlled atmosphere storage building can accommodate 340,000 bushels of apples and is one of the largest and most advanced of its kind in Canada. The facilities also feature computerized grading and sizing and custom packing using cutting edge technology. In addition, there is an on-site press where they produce approximately 750 gallons per week of their own apple cider. Many of their apples also go on to the Wellesley Cider Mill to be made into Wellesley Brand pasteurized apple cider or apple butter both of which are available in local grocery stores.

The average consumer will perhaps be most familiar with the retail side of Martin's. Steve and his wife Rose, along with various other family members, sell at the St. Jacobs market for nine months of the year. There is also the Martin's Retail Store, located at their farm on Lobsinger Line, which features a wide variety of apples and other seasonal produce in addition to apple butter, apple cider, honey, maple syrup, preserves and other local delights. Steve buys at Elmira Produce Auction Cooperative (EPAC) to augment and diversify what is offered in the store. Last year the Township of Woolwich changed its zoning bylaw allowing retailers to sell not only what they grow but also additional local product. This change, and having the auction close at hand, led to their decision to expand the on-farm retail shop in 2007. Recently at their annual Harvest Celebration event close to 5,000 visitors came through to sample apples, learn about production and taste Rose's famous apple cheese cake.

Steve points out that the retail store has been a viable part of the operation and it has helped them serve their wholesale market better. "By keeping in contact with our customers we have a better sense of what their needs are," he explains.



If you fancy a Fuji, banker for a Honeycrisp or even dare to eat a pear, Martin's Family Fruit Farm and Retail store at 1420 Lobsinger Line has it all!

Martin's has become renowned both locally and globally for their numerous varieties of apples. But a less well known factoid about Martin's is that that they are one of the few local farms that also grow pears. While apples are the focus at Martin's with over 20 varieties produced, from the beginning pear trees were also planted. Today, Martin's grows primarily Bartlets and Anjou pears and at one time also grew Bosc pears, until the trees were destroyed by a frost a few years ago.

In fact, when asked about the greatest challenge

of fruit farming Steve cites the susceptibility to factors such as unpredictable weather. And yet at the same time it is the factors that are beyond our control that keep us humble, grounded and focussed only on that which we can do, Steve believes.

For Steve, the rewards of his work are numerous. Perhaps most basic is the fact that he is providing good, wholesome food to his customers who are, in turn, very appreciative. "I get a strong sense that folks really want us to do well. Increasingly, people are embracing the local concept and supporting stores like ours," says Steve.

Another very rewarding aspect of the business for Steve has been helping new Canadians. Martin's currently has close to 50 full time employees and another 40 part time. Some have been employed with them for twenty years while others have raised families and moved on with their lives but always making time to come back for a visit. "We have a saying here", jokes Steve, "once you're here for five years, you become a Martin!"

Thanks to Bronco who came to Waterloo almost forty years ago and convinced Leighton Martin to plant those first hundred apple trees. May this community continue to reap the fruits of his labour!





Pear-fection

A traditional still life painting almost always seems to incorporate at least one beautiful, golden pear. Its gentle, sensuous curves and rich, warm hues capture our attention and still our minds. Although revered for centuries in art and literature, pears reached their pinnacle in the 17th century as the preferred fruit of European nobility. In the 18th century, pears were studied extensively in order to create new varieties and determine ideal terroirs. By the 19th century, many of our present day hybrids were already being grown and consumed by even the most humble of citizens.

Pears made their way to Ontario with the early colonists. One of the most celebrated of these introductions was the Jesuit pear planted by early French settlers near Windsor and Chatham. Today, the Canadian Clonal Genebank at Harrow (south of Windsor) has initiated a project to locate and preserve the remaining Jesuit pear trees, of which fewer than 40 remain in Essex County. These were very sturdy trees, well suited to the Canadian climate and capable of reaching heights of 80 feet with circumferences of 10 feet. Pioneers not only ate pears fresh and dried; they juiced them for cider, made furniture with the wood, and created yellow dye from the leaves.

Although there are approximately 2,500 types of pear today, five major varieties are grown in Ontario: Bartlett, Clapp's Favourite, Anjou, Bosc and Flemish Beauty. Since all are equally suited to being consumed either raw or cooked, their main distinction comes from their availability. Clapps ripen first in mid August, with Bartletts extending the season into late September. Boscs are the fall favourite, providing Ontario with pears until Christmas.

Interest in Canadian varieties continues today with a federal breeding program that originated in Harrow, but has since moved to the Vineland Station in the Niagara region. To maintain that link with Harrow, all new pear cultivars from this station are given the prefix "Har", such as Harrow Delight and Harvest Queen. Ontario is a major producer of pears in this country, accounting for over nine million pounds (4,200 tonnes) grown on 2,000 acres (830 hectares). Of all pears grown in Ontario, 75% come from the Niagara region.

As of this year, there is one more reason to love Ontario pears. Although it took 35 years to develop at the Vineland Station, a new Bartlett hybrid, Harovin Sundown, will soon be available to consumers. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) announced this past February that the new Canadian variety, whose name was chosen by Canadians in an online contest, is similar in taste and appearance to a traditional Bartlett but can withstand fire blight, a major disease of pears. According to AAFC, Harovin Sundown will be available at roadside stands and farmers' markets by next year, and in supermarkets by 2015 to 2020.

Unlike most other fruits, pears don't ripen well on the tree and



are thus harvested while still green and hard. If allowed to ripen on the tree, the sugars quickly turn to starch creating an unpleasant mushy, gritty texture. Once harvested, the pears are then packed and placed into cold storage and kept fresh for months. This is why Ontario Boscs and Anjous can still be found in the December supermarket along with pears from more southerly climates.

Pears will ripen if left on the counter, but the process can be hastened along by propping them next to a bunch of bananas that naturally release ethylene gas. Once ripened, pears will stay fresh longer if stored in the fridge. A ripe pear is relatively firm but gives a little when pressed gently. Its colour will be well developed, its flesh will be sweet, buttery and juicy, and its aroma will be ...pear like!

One medium pear provides 100 calories, 4 grams of fibre, and is a source of vitamin C, potassium, and folic acid. While pears are most likely to be scooped up out of the fruit bowl and eaten carefully poised between two hands, they do pair up beautifully with other foods. Matched with strong cheeses, smoked meats, chocolate or wine, pears add flavour and dimension to savoury and sweet dishes all year round.

The above was written by Carmen Everest-Wahl and originally published in the Fall 2008 issue of Edible Toronto magazine (www.edibletoronto.com).



Maple-Crisp Orchards

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October is Pear Month in Ontario

They're fresh, they're tasty and they are local! Ontario pears are worth celebrating and that's just what is happening for the entire month of October.

The Pear-up campaign run by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has brought together over 25 different groups, including Foodlink Waterloo Region, to promote Ontario pears in retail stores, at farmers' markets, farm stands and in restaurants across Ontario. The month-long promotion coordinates the efforts of the various 'Buy Local' groups for the common purpose of promoting Ontario food and farmers while helping the local economy and benefitting the environment. For more information please visit www.pearupontario.ca.



Poached Pears

Here's a delicious low-fat dessert starring delectable Ontario pears.

What you will need:

- 6 firm pears (peeled and cored but left whole)
- 2 cups apple cider
- 1/3 cup local honey or maple syrup
- 6 whole cloves
- 2 pods star anise
- 1 stick cinnamon

Method:

Bring cider, honey/syrup and spices to a boil in a large pot. Add the whole, peeled pears. Reduce heat and simmer until fork tender (about 10 minutes).

Remove with a slotted spoon and serve with whipped cream, ice cream or warm chocolate sauce.

Makes 6 servings.



DID YOU KNOW?

Pear wood is one of the preferred materials in the manufacture of high quality woodwind instruments and furniture.



Finding Locally Grown Pears in Waterloo Region

Foodlink's 2008 Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map features a number of farms close by that grow and sell pears or pear products. Please call for hours and availability.

2 **Hergott's Cider Mill**
928 Erb Street W., Waterloo
Tel: 519-885-2306

44 **Martin's Family Fruit Farm**
1420 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo
Tel: 519-664-2750

64 **Brian & Ann Martin**
1261 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo
Tel: 519-664-1358

3 **J. Steckle Heritage Homestead**
811 Bleams Road, Kitchener
Tel: 519-748-4690

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

69 **Sunny Slopes Family Farm**
1183 Northfield Dr. E., West Montrose
Tel: 519-664-1471

13 **Maple-Crisp Orchard**
1888 Listowel Road, Elmira
Tel: 519-669-0795

61 **Clarence Knorr**
2477 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo
Tel: 519-699-4007

70 **Valley Springs**
1764 King St. North, St. Jacobs
Tel: 519-664-3093

38 **Herrle's Country Farm Market**
1243 Erb's Road West, St. Agatha
Tel: 519-886-7576

62 **Fresh Garden Produce**
144 Southfield Dr., Elmira
Tel: 519-669-4108

71 **Winroe Gardens**
221 Katherine St. N, Winterbourne
Tel: 519-664-0556