



# Local Harvest

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## Local Food Profile: Schnurr's Grocery

John Schnurr settled in Linwood 150 years ago and set up his trade as a shoemaker in a humble log building that was also his home. Historical ledger entries reveal he regularly purchased calfskin and hides from local farmers to craft handmade shoes and boots. Today, Schnurr's Grocery stands in roughly the same location with a fourth generation Schnurr – Don and his wife Julie – at the helm. Although custom-made footwear has not been sold since the 1940s, much of the original philosophy remains the same. Schnurr's continues to source locally grown items such as produce, eggs, honey, maple syrup and meat, while supporting area farms and smaller independent suppliers.

In 1873 a spacious frame store was built to replace the original log shop and the business expanded beyond shoe making to include family provisions and dry goods. When John was ready to retire in 1900, he passed on his very successful business to his two sons, Albert and Aaron, and it became known as Schnurr Bros. At the turn of the 20th century, supplies were still brought in by wagon or stagecoach from the nearest railway station in St. Jacobs. Butter, lard, tallow, eggs, and produce from local farmers were exchanged for groceries, flour and salt.

In 1909 the Schnurr brothers purchased a large brick building just a few meters east of their store. Solid wood counters, a pressed tin ceiling and other quality fixtures were installed. Many of these fine historical features can still be seen in the Linwood store today!

Aaron's only son, Grant naturally became part of



*Proprietors Julie & Don carry on the Schnurr tradition of sourcing local products*

the family's grocery business once he graduated from high school in the early 1930s. Following his father's death in 1962, Grant assumed the role of proprietor and eventually changed the business name to G.M. Schnurr.

The 70s and 80s were tumultuous times for small town general stores as supermarkets in the city increasingly attracted shoppers from small towns. Schnurr's was one of the few of its kind to survive. Farms in the area were being purchased by Mennonites, whose simple means of transportation by horse and buggy made it difficult to travel to Waterloo for groceries.



## Local Food Profile continued

The traditional general store with its abundance of healthy local food continued to be their preferred shopping experience.

This is probably the single biggest factor that ensured our survival, says present day owner Don, who is the fourth generation of Schnurrs to live in Linwood and work at the store. He and his wife Julie took over in 1991 and changed the name to Schnurr's Grocery. While they have made many changes such as modernizing, reorganizing and even expanding, they have carried on certain traditions. Many customers still charge their groceries to an account, while others call in their orders for delivery. It is this kind of old-time service that helps to differentiate Schnurr's from the larger mainstream supermarkets.

One very important tradition that has endured is the sourcing of local products as much as possible. Some examples include apple butter, honey, maple syrup, meats, eggs, dairy, baked goods and a wide variety of produce.

"We have a roster of farmers who we deal with on a regular basis, but we also have the flexibility of purchasing from farms that end up with a bumper crop of something," says Don. For instance



*Schnurr's Grocery today looks a lot like it did a century ago*

just this past fall he acquired onions that were "the size of dinner plates" from a local farmer.

In a time when other grocery stores are struggling to adjust to the growing demand for local food, Schnurr's simply continues to do what it has done so well for many generations. Both Don and Julie value the sense of community and the many personal relationships they have formed with the local clientele. At the same time they are able to play a vital role in helping to get food from the farm to

the table.

As they celebrate their milestone sesquicentennial anniversary, Schnurr's has much to be proud of. Throughout the decades they have continued to adapt to the times while respecting their community values and maintaining their local commitment. Clearly, they have discovered the winning recipe for success.

*Schnurr's is located at 5168 Ament Line in Linwood. They are planning to officially commemorate their 150th with a customer appreciation barbeque in June. At the same time they will launch their newly published booklet "Schnurr's Store Linwood 150 years, 1858-2008". For more information please call 519-698-2370.*



## Finding Locally Grown Onions in Waterloo Region

If you're looking for onions why not consult Foodlink's *Buy Local! Buy Fresh!* Map. The 2007 edition features a number of farms close by that grow and sell them. Please call for hours and availability.



J. Steckle Heritage Homestead  
811 Bleams Rd, Kitchener  
Tel: 519-748-4690



Brubacher's Produce  
1562 Halm Road  
West Montrose  
Tel: 519-664-3214



Sunny Slopes Family Farm  
1183 Northfield Dr. East, Conestogo  
Tel: 519-664-1471



TJ's Farm Fresh Produce  
3010 Kossuth Road  
Cambridge  
Tel: 519-650-1007



Conestogo Garden Produce  
1228 Northfield Drive  
Conestogo



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



Gmach Produce  
1381 Huron Road  
New Dundee  
Tel: 519-894-1834



Floralane Produce  
2191 Arthur St. North  
Elmira  
Tel: 519-669-3154



Weber's Family Farm  
2844 Lobsinger Line  
Heidelberg  
Tel: 519-699-6025



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



Clarence Knorr  
2477 Lobsinger Line  
Heidelberg  
Tel: 519-669-4007



Winroe Gardens  
221 Katherine St. North, Winterbourne  
Tel: 519-664-3501



Phenning's Organic Vegetables  
1209 Waterloo St., Baden  
Tel: 519-662-3468



Edward & Selema Martin  
144 Southfield Dr., Elmira  
Tel: 519-669-4108



## The Skin-ny on Onions

Local food is typically all about fresh aromas and succulent flavours. Well, here is where fresh onions and garlic diverge from the norm. In fact, if one were to go by smell alone, it would certainly be difficult to distinguish a truly fresh onion or garlic bulb from a ripe (or under-ripe) neighbour since intact bulbs are almost odourless. And, there probably aren't too many of us bold enough to try the taste test for freshness! Any fresh allium is likely to be identified by a firmness that almost makes it seem to burst out of its dry, crisp, papery skin.

Alliums are a family of plants that include not only garlic and onion but also shallots, leeks, scallions, chives and lilies. They include more than 400 species, occurring mainly in temperate climates of the northern hemisphere. The processes that create the strong odours and flavours in sliced alliums are also responsible for the release of potent chemicals that may assist in the prevention of many modern health afflictions, including heart disease, cancer, and immune system deficiencies.

### An Ancient Health Food

This isn't front page news. Onions and garlic have long been identified as medicines in ancient cultures and have long enjoyed a reputation as a health food. It is believed that onions originated in central Asia and were being cultivated there over 5000 years ago. Onions would have appealed to our ancestors as they were less perishable than

other fresh plant foods, were easy to grow and transport, and could be dried for later use – all factors that continue to make the onion so appealing in the modern kitchen. It's also quite possible that onions were used to quench thirst as water comprises 89% of their total weight.

Huge quantities of onions were consumed by ancient Egyptians, and several tombs of pharaohs included carvings and actual dried remains of onion and garlic, intended for meals in the after-life. In fact, Egyptians regarded onions as a symbol of eternity, based on their circle within a circle structure. The old testament of the Bible records the expelled Israelites lamenting to Moses that they no longer had access to the leeks, onions, and garlic so widely available in Egypt. Around 2000 years ago in India, the famous Ayurvedic medical treatise Charaka Samhita celebrated the onion as being useful for digestion, the heart, the eyes and the joints. In the Greek tradition, Olympic athletes were fortified by consuming pounds of raw onions and onion juice before the games, finishing off with a good onion rub-down all over their skin.

The Romans ate onions regularly and carried them on journeys to their provinces in the west. Just like all the onion eaters be-



fore them, Europeans must also have loved these pungent bulbs since they became one of the three most important vegetables of the Middle Ages along with beans and cabbage. Curiously, onions were prescribed as a cure for headaches, snakebites, and hair loss. Early colonists to the Americas brought their onion bulbs with them but found that varieties of wild onions were available and widely used by the indigenous populations. For example, in modern British Columbia, the Salish collected and consumed several species of native onions and lilies that they ate raw but also roasted or steamed in underground pits.

### Garlic: The Onion's Poor Cousin

Also originating in central Asia, garlic has a slightly different history. Although it has been consumed as a food for thousands of years, more often than not it was considered a food for the poorer classes – the soldiers, labourers, and farmers. Across many cultures, over hundreds of centuries, garlic has been considered to have antibacterial and cardio-protective properties, and current research supports the ancient herbalists. Just what is it about garlic that makes it such a potent ingredient in the herbal medicine cabinet?

*Allicin* is a powerful phytonutrient derived from garlic, providing the greatest reputed health benefits. It does not, however, exist in its active form unless the raw bulb is first chopped or crushed and left for 10 minutes



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before using in food preparation. Allicin starts to degrade immediately when cooked and microwaving seems to destroy it altogether. To receive the optimum health benefits from allicin, raw garlic should be combined with food just before serving. This is good news for garlic lovers as raw, crushed garlic also packs the most powerful flavour punch! The second major medicinal ingredient of garlic is sulphides, which are less powerful than allicin but are able to survive cooking. Garlic still needs to be crushed to release the benefits of the sulphides, and that is why onions and garlic smell rather mild sitting in your hand at the farmers' market. One quick slice with a knife and the enzymatic reaction that produces the sulphides is set into motion, releasing the pungent aroma. Garlic also has high levels of vitamins C and B6, as well as selenium and manganese.

Onions contain a number of sulphides similar to those found in garlic that may also lower blood pressure and prevent heart disease. In addition, onions are very rich in chromium (a trace mineral that helps cells respond to insulin), vitamin C, folic acid, B6, B1 and quercetin. This last nutrient, an important flavonoid, has been shown to halt the growth of tumours in animals and to protect colon cells from the damaging effects of certain cancer-causing substances. Cooking meats with onions may help reduce the amount of carcinogens produced when meat is cooked using high heat methods – a very traditional way of preparing meat in many countries!

## Choosing the Right Variety

There are generally two types of large, globe-shaped onions – mild and storage. The former class includes those that are grown in warm weather climates and have characteristic mild or sweet tastes such as Vidalia. Storage onions are grown in cooler climates and are left to dry for several months after harvesting. They generally have a more pungent flavour and are usually named by their color: white, yellow or red. The consumer trend to purchase the less pungent, milder onion varieties could be construed as a less healthy choice since onions with stronger flavour and astringency have higher levels of sulphides. It's safe to say that the more you cry when cutting an onion, the more valuable it is to your health.

Onions and garlic should be stored at room temperature in a well ventilated container away from bright light. Onions with more pungent flavours such as yellow cooking onions can be stored longer than the sweeter onions as the sulphides act as preservatives. Hard-necked garlic (the kind with the woody core between the cloves) is a better keeper than the Softneck varieties, and it also has more intense garlic flavour.

On the subject of Hardnecks, these are the variety best suited to cold climates like Canada's and is the variety most often grown in Ontario. Softnecks generally come from China. There are studies that suggest cloves of the Hardneck garlic have higher sugar content than grapes, which is why they mellow so nicely when baked at low temperatures. Furthermore, only the Hardnecks produce a seed pod

in June, called a scape, which can be lightly sautéed to infuse a dish with a mild garlic flavour.

Most farm stands and market gardens in Waterloo County have onions, however the region is not known as a major producer of this product. In Ontario 5700 acres of onions were harvested in 2006, resulting in 185 millions pounds of the pungent bulbs with a farm value of \$18 million. The major production area in Canada for garlic is in south-western Ontario. In 2006, producers planted 215 acres, resulting in 370,000 pounds of garlic for a farm value of almost \$7 million.

And what about that medieval notion that onions could cure hair loss? Well, there are some preliminary studies that suggest that the ability of the sulphur compounds to promote circulation and decrease inflammation in the skin can jumpstart hair growth in people with sulphur-deficient diets. It would be interesting to know if those ancient Greek athletes, with their regular onion juice rub-downs, were any hairier than the average Greek male.

## German Zwiebelkuchen (Onion Pie)

Zwiebelkuchen is an onion pie from Swabia, in south-central Germany. It is easy to make and there is plenty of room for improvisation and local ingredients.

### What you will need:

- 6 pounds local onions, sliced
- 4 slices bacon or smoked ham
- 1 (16 ounce) container sour cream
- 4 eggs
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon caraway seed
- pastry for two- 9 inch single pie crusts



### Method:

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees F (220 degrees C). Line a jelly-roll pan or large pizza pan with prepared dough, making sure dough extends up sides of pan.
2. Saute onions until translucent and transfer into a large mixing bowl. Place bacon in a large, deep skillet. Cook over medium high heat until evenly browned. Drain, chop and add to onion; mix well.
3. Stir in sour cream. Beat eggs enough to break up yolks and then mix into pie mixture. Add flour to thicken mixture (onions will create a lot of water), then add salt. Mix well and pour mixture into prepared pan. Sprinkle top with caraway seed.
4. Bake in preheated oven for about 1 hour, or until onions start to turn golden brown on top.