



Local Harvest

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Features

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Region



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Local Farm Profile: Aberle Farms

Imagine freshly picked, locally-grown organic produce delivered weekly right to your door! Sound too good to be true? Not if you are part of **Aberle Farms** Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program. As more and more people recognize the true value and multiple benefits of eating locally, CSA's and food box programs are becoming de rigour.

Aberle Farms, located just east of Elmira bears the distinction of being the very first independent farmer-run CSA in Waterloo Region. Christine and Stephen Aberle have been growing fruits, vegetables and herbs for their own family for over twenty years but in 2000 they decided to launch an organic CSA business. Like many farmers, they were hit hard when the hog market crashed in '98 and began to look for alternatives.

For a short time both Christine and Stephen took jobs off the farm but "this just didn't feel right", says Christine, adding "I wanted our farm to be able to support itself". Meanwhile, her sister had suggested the idea of starting a CSA after seeing a successful model in Dundas, Ontario. Christine's off-the-farm work experience at a local newspaper did come in handy though, as she was able to channel her marketing and publicity skills into building up their new their business.

"We jumped in with both feet," quips Stephen.



Stephen & Christine Aberle proudly display a food box of their freshly harvested organic produce.

"It was lucky that we were ground breakers because we could start small and learn as we went along". Our first year in 2000 we had just ten clients, most of which are still on board, he says. This particular year also happened to coincide with a total tomato crop failure because of the copious rainfall. Luckily, our clients were very forgiving and understood the nature of this type of business, adds Christine. Now, in their ninth year, membership has grown to 68 clients or 83 shares, bringing them to almost full capacity. A full share is approximately 2-4 grocery bags a week and is enough vegetables to feed a family of four or larger, while a half share is about 1-2 bags per week and enough for a family of two or three.

By purchasing a CSA subscription share, the consumer benefits because they receive fresh



Local Food Profile continued

seasonal produce delivered weekly to their door. The farmer, in turn, receives the start up capital necessary to purchase seeds and supplies. Clients share in the harvest as well as the risk. Fortunately, total crop failures are few and far between and diversification helps ensure a bountiful yield.

For the Aberles, it all begins early in the year, when frost and snow still abound. Christine starts her seeds in a small greenhouse out back. She first plants tomatoes and peppers and follows with eggplant, cole plants, lettuce, leeks and melons. In total the Aberles grow over 30 kinds of produce and well over a dozen herbs. Food boxes even include special tags that identify the herbs and what to do with them. Customers also receive a monthly newsletter containing information and recipes about their fresh vegetables.

One of the aspects that differentiates Aberles is their commitment to organic farming. “From the beginning we have grown our produce organically, without the use of any pesticides,” says Christine. “We follow organic farming practices such as crop rotation, hand picking off insects, and using our own compost made of cattle manure.” The Aberles also have a number of other tricks up their sleeves such as spraying a ‘compost tea’ on tomato leaves to help combat blight and applying a baking soda solution to their cucumbers to discourage mildew. Their infamous organic blend of composted manure mulch is available farm-gate and is highly sought after by local gardeners.

Harvest season generally runs from June to October. During this time the Aberles employ a half-dozen or so workers including their daughter Vanessa and Stephen’s father Murray who is still very active on the farm. Murray hand-crafted the eighty plus wooden food boxes, harvesting the pine from a forest on the property. The Aberles also have two grown sons who have worked on the farm over the years.

Vanessa aptly refers to Thursdays as “crazy harvest day”. This day begins with an early morning harvesting of the produce, followed by the assembly of the food boxes, and finally the afternoon deliveries. Christine drops off to clients in Elmira and north Waterloo, while Stephen covers off the south end of KW.

A typical August food box includes tomatoes, tomatillos, eggplant, cucumbers, zucchini, broccoli, peppers, potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, beets, parsley, basil and oregano. Clients can customize their order specifying anything that they do not wish to receive. The filled orders are truly a feast for the senses..a riot of colourful, aromatic produce artfully packed into their aesthetic wooden boxes.

The Aberles grow many heirloom crops, some of which have been passed on down through their families. Stephen is a fourth-generation farmer whose great, great uncle built the very house they currently live in. Christine recounts the story of her grandmother’s fingerling potatoes and how a relative managed to bring back a pocket full of seeds from Germany. Now the Aberles and their CSA clients can continue to enjoy the precious spuds!









Despite the hard work and unpredictability of Mother Nature, the Aberles clearly enjoy what they do. Most farmers grow their product and then send it off, but the Aberles remain intimately connected with the full cycle of their business. “One of the biggest rewards is knowing who we grow for,” says Christine, adding that they often get little notes from their clients. “It really motivates us to put our best into all that we do,” she says.

Aberle Farms is located at 2639 Northfield Dr. E. (#56 on the BLBF map). For more information or to inquire about their CSA program please call 519-669-2097 or email aberle@sympatico.ca.



Finding Locally Grown Broccoli in Waterloo Region

If you are looking broccoli why not consult Foodlink’s Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map? The 2008 edition features a number of farms close by that produce and sell it.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
|  Bowman’s Organic Produce
6391 Sideroad 19, Wallenstein
Tel: 519-698-2960 |  Martin’s Family Fruit Farm
1420 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo
Tel: 519-664-2750 |  Maurice Martin
6049 Line 86, West Montrose
Tel: 519-669-0740 |
|  Herrle’s Country Farm Market
1243 Erb’s Road West, St. Agatha
Tel: 519-886-7576 |  Brubacher’s Produce
1562 Halm Road
West Montrose
Tel: 519-664-3214 |  Winroe Gardens
221 Katherine St. N.
Winterbourne
Tel: 519-664-0556 |
|  Pfennings Organic Vegetables
1209 Waterloo St. Baden
Tel: 519-662-3468 |  Floralane Produce
2191 Arthur St. N., Elmira
Tel: 519-669-3154 | |



Heads Up on Broccoli

Broccoli is a jewel among brassicas, a family of vegetables that originated from the wild cabbages of the Mediterranean coasts. The early progenitor, which more closely resembled a leafy green, was eventually bred into a hundreds of species that include cauliflower, cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, brussels sprouts, and even nasturtiums. The reason for this explosion in physical differentiation is that many brassicas can be fertilized with the pollen from any other brassica species, which ultimately allowed for the evolution of the wide variety of vegetables that we know today.

Broccoli, however, appears to have taken brassica evolution to new heights, becoming one of the nutritional powerhouses of our diet. Even the abundant fleshy flower heads, usually green in color, arranged in a tree-like fashion on branches sprouting from a thick, edible stalk are a work of evolutionary art. Indeed, the Latin word for branch, *bracchium*, and the Italian *brocco* for stalk, influenced horticulturalists in naming this particular cultivar. With selective cultiva-

tion over the centuries, farmers were able to develop broccoli varieties with larger and larger budding heads until broccoli became the vegetable we know today. Further cultivation resulted in heads that were lighter and lighter in color, until they eventually became cauliflower.

Two thousand years ago, Romans were much taken with broccoli. Pliny the Elder, an Italian naturalist and writer of the first century CE, writes about the pleasure that people took in growing and consuming broccoli, particularly the calabrese variety that is still most commonly eaten in North America. It would appear that the Italians were alone

in their fascination with this vegetable as it is not mentioned again in Europe until the 16th century in France, but not with much praise. Italian immigrants to North America in the 19th century brought broccoli to their backyard gardens, but still it wasn't until after World War I that broccoli began to appear on dinner tables across the country. However, in the past two decades, broccoli has shed any lingering stigmas that the non-Italian community held and become one of the most popular vegetables in the grocery aisle, thanks in large part to its well known health benefits.

The edible parts of the broccoli plant are the tender stems and unopened flower buds. While less frequently consumed, the leaves and sprouts are perfectly edible and contain concentrated amounts of the nutrients



found in the flower. Broccoli has multiple cancer-fighting properties including vitamin C, beta carotene, and fibre. It is also rich in phytochemicals such as indole carbinol and sulforaphane, which appear to offer protection against certain cancers and heart disease, as well as enhancing the immune system.

Ounce for ounce, boiled broccoli has more vitamin C than an orange and as much calcium as a glass of milk, according to the USDA's nutrient database. One medium spear has three times more fibre than a slice of whole wheat bread. Broccoli is also one of the richest sources of vitamin A in the produce section and has also been found to speed up the removal of estrogen from the body, which could assist in suppressing some forms of breast cancer.

Both cooked and raw broccoli make excel-



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lent additions to your meal plan. Some of the health-supporting compounds in broccoli can be increased by slicing or chewing, which help to initiate enzymatic activity. Since most of the vitamins and phytonutrients are water soluble, they are apt to leach out into the cooking water. To maintain, therefore, as much of the healthful properties of broccoli as possible, the florets should be lightly steamed or sautéed and not boiled for long periods of time.

Chefs have long appreciated broccoli's many attributes. They use its bristle-brush florets to convey colourful dips and sauces to the mouth. They julienne and chop the stems, scattering them like green confetti into salads and vegetable dishes. Chinese cooks have traditionally kept it crisp, applying a quick stir fry to tiny clustered florets and grated stalks. For the authentic cooks among us, Apicius's recipe from over 2000 years ago recommends boiling the broccoli and then tossing it with a mixture of cumin and coriander seeds, chopped onion, and a splatter of oil and wine.

Most of the broccoli grown in Ontario is the Paragon variety, although Cruiser and Premium Crop are also popular. When purchasing broccoli, look for bright green stems and tightly budded flowers. If the flowers have begun to open into small yellow petals, or if the stems are thick and split open, the broccoli is past its prime. Broccoli can be stored in the vegetable crisper for up to 5 days.

Broccoli is grown for three main markets in Canada: fresh, frozen and organic, with the majority going to the fresh market. According to Statistics Canada, all domestically produced broccoli is currently consumed within the country and not exported. In 2007, Ontario grew 1416 hectares (3500 acres) of broccoli, about one third of total Canadian production.

DID YOU KNOW?

Since all brassica vegetables share a common feature – four-petaled flowers that resemble a Greek cross – they have been frequently referred to as crucifers or cruciferous vegetables.



CLASSIC BROCCOLI SALAD

Here's a great recipe featuring broccoli as the star ingredient along with other local treats such as bacon and cheese. Feel free to improvise by adding your favourite fruits, nuts and seeds.

What you will need:

- 1-2 heads broccoli
- 1/2 cup chopped red onion
- 6-8 slices bacon
- 1 cup shredded cheese

Dressing:

- 1 cup mayonnaise (or half cup each mayo and yogurt)
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 1/4 cup sugar



Fry bacon until crispy, drain grease and set aside. Cut up about 4 cups of broccoli florets into bite-sized pieces, leaving just a little stem. Add onion, cheese and dressing. Refrigerate 2-3 hours or overnight. Crumble bacon into bits, add to bowl and toss salad just before serving.

Variations: add chopped celery, apples, raisins, walnuts or sunflower seeds.





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