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Fresh In Focus
Apple Cider

LocalHarvest

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Features

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Finding Local Apple Cider & Apple Butter in Waterloo Region

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Local Food Profile: Wellesley Brand Apple Products

The Village of Wellesley has practically become synonymous with one of the region's great success stories—*Wellesley Brand Apple Products.* Just as the roots of an apple tree run deep, so do the roots of this local family business which was started by Aaron Jantzi in 1922. Today, it is run by grandsons Kevin and Steve at the original mill site on Nafziger Road. They continue to use the same rack and cloth technique for pressing and an old Pennsylvania Dutch apple butter recipe that their grandfather used.

While much remains the same, such as their philosophy to use quality apples, there have also been changes over the years. In the early days the business was a seasonal custom-pressing operation. "There were no storage facilities back then so for a few months of the year they'd start at the crack of dawn and work until they were done," explains Kevin.

In 1960 Kevin and Steve's father bought the business and began to build some wholesale markets while the custom work gradually died down. *Wellesley Brand Apple Products* soon became a year-round operation with a growing reputation and strong brand recognition.

Today brothers Steve and Kevin are at the helm, moving seamlessly from production to sales to day-to-day operations. They have twelve employees and an on-site retail store. Business growth has been steady over the years and *Wellesley Brand Apple Products* are available in major grocery stores in not only in the KW and Guelph area, but also in Toronto, Barrie and Windsor way.

"As much as possible we use local fruit, with all of our apples coming from Ontario within a 100 kilometer radius," says Steve. Some of the apples even come from *Martin's Family Fruit Farm,* just down the road on Lobsinger Line in Waterloo. *Martin's* is an award-winning year-round supplier of apples to countries throughout the world, yet they maintain their commitment to serving the local community. In addition to carrying *Wellesley Brand Apple Products* in their retail shop, *Martin's* also produces a limited amount of their own apple cider.

The Kings of Apple Cider: Kevin and Steve Jantzi are the third generation to carry on their family business

The Wellesley plant is approximately 12 thousand square feet, used for both storage and production, with an additional storage facility in Kitchener. "We're cramped for space", says Kevin pointing out that the upper floor is used primarily for cider while the main floor houses the apple butter processing. They are also creative in how space is used, alternately employing a segment of

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Local Food Profile continued

the plant for bottling for part of the week and then using the same area for labelling for the latter part of the week.

Up to five apple varieties are used for making cider. "The trick is getting the right blend of sweet and tart," says Steve. At Wellesley two types of cider is produced—Fresh Pressed, which is considered the "King of Cider", as well as clear, filtered and pasteurized type of cider available in glass bottles.

Once the apples are washed, they are crushed using a traditional method of pressing because this, claims Steve, is a superior method despite that fact that the equipment is fifty years old. During busy weeks in the fall cider production occurs five days per week, while in the slower seasons it is generally made three days per week. Fresh pressed cider looks darker than other ciders because it contains more of the flavourful solids, giving it a wonderful fresh taste much like biting into an apple.

Wellesley Brand Apple Products carries the distinction of being one of only a few commercial apple butter producers in Canada. Like the cider, this rich, delicious spread uses only apples, with no addition of sugar, water or other additives. While cider is best made with earlier, tarter apples, apple butter uses sweeter apples that come later in the season. A combination of freshly pressed cider and apple puree is added to a large steam vat and then boiled until the evaporation process has reduced its volume by about seven times.

Most apples store well, says Steve, allowing production of both cider and apple butter for ten months of the year. During July and August the plant closes for a respite, before the busy fall season. December, however, is generally the busiest month of the year. The on-site retail shop at 3800 Nafziger Road is open year round and carries apples, apple butter, apple syrup and an assortment of preserves and other apple products.

Community connections have always been an integral part of *Wellesley Brand Apple Products.* In addition to supporting local businesses and projects, the Jantzi family has participated in the Wellesley Apple Butter and Cheese Festival since its inception 25 years ago. During the festival which takes place on the last Saturday of September in the Village of Wellesley tours of the mill are offered to participants.

The Jantzis have proven that they have a winning recipe not only for the apple butter and cider, but also for running their business. However, it has not been without its challenges, says Kevin, citing ever-changing regulatory issues as one of the primary ones. Another challenge has been the changing nature of sales and the proliferation of larger food chains. "Gone are the days of going in the back door and shaking the manager's hand," says Kevin. "Today, only a couple of people make all of the decisions and there is a lot of red tape."

But fortunately the rewards of running the business outweigh the challenges. The brothers enjoy hearing from customers who are delighted with their products, particularly as more and more people seek out all-natural, less-processed foods. "We are happy to be able to contribute to people's good health by offering wholesome products," says Kevin.

Steve is particularly proud of the fact that their business practises leave a small environmental footprint. By using local apples, carbon emissions are kept to a minimum. In addition, nothing goes to waste. "We use all parts of the apple, including the pulp which goes into a feed lot," says Steve.

For both Jantzi brothers the biggest reward has been the pride they experience in carrying forward the family business that their grandfather started in 1922. May it continue to flourish for many years to come!

For more information on *Wellesley Brand Apple Products* call 519-656-2400 or visit www.wellappleproducts.com.

Wellesley
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Pressing News: Apple Cider

Imagine the aroma and flavour of a ripe apple in an autumn orchard, the faintly acidic scent of fallen leaves and crisp country air in the background. Now imagine drinking that same apple. It's not impossible if you have access to a glass of fresh apple cider, and in Waterloo County there are plenty of cider mills to fill our glasses.

Apple cider was a flourishing industry in Europe well before the first settlers arrived in Canada. While the apple originated in central Asia, it was the conquering Romans of the first century BCE who spread apple seeds throughout Europe. Eventually, apples were pressed into cider and became a popular drink for both young and old. This type of cider is not what we would see in our local stores today - in order to stay fresh until the next apple harvest and kill all bacteria, the pressed juices were allowed to ferment with their naturally-occurring yeasts into a hard cider with a 5-7% alcohol content. In fact, cider was by definition understood to be an alcoholic drink. Only in recent North American history has cider meant fresh-squeezed, sweet apple juice. In Europe today, cider is still understood to be alcoholic.

By the 1800s, many European rivers were already polluted, making the water unfit to drink. People became dependant on wine, beer, and cider for their fluid requirements. Even children daily consumed the alcoholic cider, but their glasses would have been filled with a watered down version made from a second pressing of the apples, with only 1-2% alcohol! The earliest recorded permanent settlers to maritime Canada came principally from Normandy, and with them came the thirst for apple cider. Samuel Champlain found little wild apples growing in the region east of Georgian Bay in 1615, but as these were rather hard and unpleasant to eat, Champlain and other settlers at Port Royal began to import European varieties in the form of saplings or seeds. As colonies grew throughout Quebec and Ontario, the saplings and cider followed.

Almost every town in those days had at least one cider press. The farmers would haul their apples to the cider mill where they would be processed and the juice put into wooden barrels. The typical family put up 40 gallons of cider per person. So, if your family comprised a wife, husband and six kids that would amount to 320 gallons. As it takes about one third of a bushel to make a gallon of cider, our farmer would need to grow at least 110 bushels for cider alone, not to mention the bushels of apples required for drying and storing.

As the settlers moved further west, it became difficult to grow European apple varietals in these colder, more arid regions. Later, as more people moved from the

country to the city, there wasn't adequate transportation to deliver apple cider from the farms to the urban areas. Meanwhile German beer, with its faster fermentation process, was introduced into North America. German immigrants began to build large sophisticated breweries for producing beer in great quantities while apple cider production remained limited to the small farms. These cultural changes, in effect, decreased the popularity of hard cider and it wasn't until the 1990s when microbreweries started up the ancient process of fermenting apples into alcohol that hard apple cider once again enjoyed its renaissance.

But what of the sweet cider poured warm or cold on a cool winter's evening that evokes such strong memories of its fresh precursor? Well, first of all, it is important to distinguish between apple juice and apple cider. To make both cider and juice, apples are washed, cut and ground into a mash called pomace or pommage that is the consistency of applesauce. Layers of mash are wrapped in cloth, and placed on wooden racks. A hydraulic press squeezes the layers, and the juice flows into refrigerated tanks. This unfiltered juice, full of pulp and pectin, is bottled as apple cider. Apple juice results when this raw juice is filtered to remove solids, pasteurized, and canned making it less tart and tangy than cider. Sweet cider needs to be refrigerated to prevent it from fermenting. To extend its storage time, cider can also be frozen but be sure to leave room in the container for expansion. Lack of proper refrigerated storage

Hergott's Cider Mill

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is likely the reason behind the popularity of hard over sweet cider in the past. But it's likely that the health movement of the early 1970s contributed to a thirst for a more holistic, less processed apple juice as well.

While there are perfect cider apples, varieties which have a good balance or aromatic oils, sugar, tannin, and acid, they are becoming quite rare in a country that favours the dessert apple. To make a good sweet cider, you need a balanced mixture of apple varieties – some bland for the base juice, some tart and acidic to liven up the flavour, a few bitter apples with astringent tannins to give body and character, and some aromatic apples for bouquet and flavour. There is some local competitiveness among cider mills in apple country for the highest quality blends, and makers keep their formulas secret. One trick used to add interest to a cider blend is to add crab apple juice to the mixture.

Drinking a glass of sweet cider is almost like eating an apple, except all of the fibre found in the skin has been removed. Otherwise, the juice is a good source of potassium and iron, with no added sugar or other additives. A 6 ounce (175ml) glass has only 87 calories and a healthy dose of pectin, which has been shown to keep serum cholesterol levels down.

Other products of the cider making process are also popular at cider mills and farmer's markets. Apple syrup is a result of the cider being boiled down into a thicker, sweeter product that tastes delicious on pancakes, ice cream, and other desserts. Similarly, apple butter is made by condensing cider and apple puree in a steam vat rendering a tasty spread that can be eaten straight or used in barbeque sauces. Apple cider vinegar occurs naturally through a secondary fermentation of hard cider by airborne acetobacter (acetic bacteria). As with vinegars from other natural sources, apple cider vinegar is prized for a number of natural home remedies and its potential for disease prevention.

Some traditions are associated with cider, most notably the Wassail (from Wass Hall, or Be Thou of Good Health) in which Farmers and farm workers would salute their apple trees. The ceremony, which would take place around Christmas, involved participants carrying jugs of cider into the orchards, drinking to the trees' health, and praying for next year's crop. The cider would then be poured around the tree roots, and cider soaked cake would be placed in the branches as a thanksgiving to the spirit of the tree.

In thanksgiving for all that apples have to offer, enjoy a glass of warm or cold cider at your next meal.

Finding Apple Cider & Apple Butter in Waterloo Region

If you're looking for apple cider or apple butter consult Foodlink's *Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map.* The 2007 edition features a number of farms close by that produce and sell it.

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

8 Oakridge Acres/
Well Fed Meat Store
2132 Greenfield Rd. Ayr
Tel: 519-632-7653

12 Nauman's
3250 Hessen Strasse, St. Clements
Tel: 519-669-5524

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

14 Amon Martin
3124 Lobsinger Line,
Heidelberg

18 Unfactory Farm
5415 Streicher Line, Crosshill
Tel: 519-656-2691

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

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

47 Orchard Hill Produce
7203 Blind Line, Elmira
Tel: 519-669-0815

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

Apple Cider Pumpkin Bread

Here's a recipe that features two local foods—pumpkin and apple—and carries the added benefit of being low in fat and sugar!

What you will need:

1½ cups (375 ml) local apple cider
1 cup (250 ml) pumpkin puree
2 eggs
¼ cup canola oil
½ cup firmly packed brown sugar
½ cup grated apple
2 cups all purpose flour
2 tsps baking soda
½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground mace
¼ tsp ground cloves
1 tsp ground cinnamon

Method:

In a saucepan, boil the cider until it is reduced to about 1/4 cup) and let it cool. In a bowl, whisk together the pumpkin puree, eggs, oil, brown sugar, grated apple and the reduced cider.

In another bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, baking soda, mace, cloves and cinnamon. Add the flour mixture to the pumpkin mixture and stir until just combined. Transfer batter to a well greased 8 x 4-inch loaf pan and bake in a preheated 350F (180C) oven for 1 hour or until a tester comes out clean. Let the bread cool.

Top with apple butter and serve with hot apple cider.