



Why fostering food literacy at the grassroots level benefits Ontario

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Eric Bowman raises organic cattle in Durham County. He has an honours degree in animal sciences and his son has a masters in agronomy. A bit of a farmer-philosopher, he calls his 190-acre property Gallery on the Farm, and his website has lyrics from Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi".

Food literacy is dear to the heart of this fourth-generation farmer. He says most farmers are too humble. "We don't blow our own horn. We should," Bowman says. "Society doesn't know why we do stuff. And we're usually doing it for the betterment of the environment."

Bowman spends time educating visitors on what it means to be a farmer — and he has a lot of opportunity to meet his customers face to face because he only sells directly from his farm shop. He wishes Ontario's school systems did a better job with curricula focused on agriculture, food origin, environment issues and even cooking basics.

In 2013, Ontario put into effect the Local Food Act with some emphasis on food literacy. "We're encouraging people to go to their farmers' market, support farmers in an immediate way, and to ask themselves 'where does my food come from?'" said Jeff Leal, minister of agriculture, food

and rural affairs.

A prime mandate of the Greenbelt Fund is to bridge that gap between urban and rural by connecting the food consumers to the food producers.

Programs such as OntarioFresh.ca, a B2B network linking producers and buyers, raise awareness of the full range of Ontario-produced food products available with a searchable database of agri-food businesses and products.

The Foodland Ontario website promotes local food with farmer profiles, recipes and an index of seasonal foods. Toronto's FoodShare designs classroom tools and conducts work-



Peaches on sale at the Burlington Farmers Market.

shops. Its annual "Big Crunch" promotes the eating of fresh produce in schools, having engaged with almost one million people since 2006. The Good Food Box program lets con-

sumers access seasonal local foods with a weekly delivery, and at a fair price.

Progress is being made with food literacy, says Anne Freeman of the Greenbelt Farmers' Market Network but "I think we've got a long way to go."

She says that engaging intellectually with food and food producers "contributes to health in many ways" from social engagement to physical activity.

"At markets it is so common to strike up a conversation, and a friendly banter happens. You might see a radish you've never seen before and have a conversation about it."

Strong farming and rural economies...possible

To learn how the Greenbelt Fund is changing the way we eat and drink local in Ontario visit Greenbeltfund.ca/news



Possibility grows here.