

the backforty

THE FAMILIES, FOOD AND FARM-LIFE OF HURON-KINLOSS

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huron-kinloss

Shake hands with Mother Earth

Tomatoes taste better here. Children smile wider. Dandelions have an upside. Cheese goes with beer. Bread dough is hand-made every morning. Sunrises are as inspiring as sunsets are conclusive. Even breathing is more rewarding. When you live or travel closer to the land, perspectives change.

Maybe it's a lucky outcome of governments past or the nature of the land formations, but Huron-Kinloss in the southern part of Bruce County is where smaller family farms on manageable parcels of land still abound. This is where Lake Huron moderates the growing season, where freshly-picked produce is sold by auction and where the experience of choosing how you eat, play and find balance in your life is unique.

Backforty is an exploration of local life/work experiences. You'll meet good people who exemplify what is far too often reserved for moments of nostalgia. Yet *Backforty* isn't about yesteryear. It's a peek into the future, perhaps yours. Because chances are good you'll be inspired by what others have achieved.





the

KNOWLEDGE WORKER

Raised on a family farm in Ripley Ontario, educated at U Waterloo (biology), growing her own (chickens and garlic among other basic necessities) and able to speak ‘farm and food’ regardless of who is sitting across from her: Heather Newman is the consummate new-age knowledge worker, though not in the context you’d expect. Heather’s database is a blend of working farm and homestead, her network touches every aspect of living closer to the land, and her expertise is generated by a deep desire to connect better food choices with families in the area and beyond.

Right top: Newman sisters Natalie and Jaclyn take care of the chicks among other chores and are as at home with their farm to table lifestyle as Mom and Dad are.

Right lower left: There's room for the neighbours at the Newman Farm Heritage Garlic plot.

Right lower right: More than produce comes out of this garden. This is where families grow together and knowledge (and laughter) are shared from an early age.



D&H Newman is a business and a lifestyle (D is for Dan, Heather's husband, who was also born and raised in the area and a control technician for Bruce Power). It's a business in that they are both farmers and pioneers in integrating modern living with local eating. They help other farmers connect to consumers, and build the bond of shared ownership in what gets produced. On the lifestyle side, she and Dan made the decision that she'd trade employment outside the home for producing food on her 12.5 acres, raising their four children (age 7-15) and bridging the knowledge gaps between what we grow, how we grow it and the nutrition that is available to our families.

"I understand farmers because I am one and have been all my life. I also understand the science and the practical challenges of growing healthier food – just as well as I understand the challenges of making food and nutrition a priority at home. There are knowledge gaps and an even wider gap in skills that were common place just 2 generations ago; there's no one-size-fits-all solution. We fill those gaps as a trusted source of information for everyone in the local food chain."

Heather believes we've had a few generations now to determine the impact of large-scale and feed-only farming, and that rebalancing is imminent. Smaller-scale farms and localized food production serve as a buffer to the all-or-nothing scenario.

"We're blessed here in Huron-Kinloss – not just with amazing soil, but also a full gamut of lifestyle choices. You may not want to raise your own chickens, but you do want to can your own tomato sauce. You may want to learn to grow your own food and you may also want to share the joy from planting to harvest. This is where you can think outside the box, and the best thing is, the expertise is here to help you bring that choice to life."

Heather, among others in the area, is growing a network of experts who have experimented and pioneered new ideas between farm and table for years. Organic growing, CSAs, sourcing local and making nutrition affordable are not passing trends. This is a way of life here and it works.

"Knowing where your food comes from is the starting point. A friend of mine struggled to get her children to eat vegetables. We

produced a bean crop together, but she only wanted a quart or two – thinking her kids would take a pass. She was back the next day for more – because her children could taste the difference and loved it."

The H in D&H Newman is changing lives, perhaps one bean at a time, but more often than not, by connecting people and knowledge to create a more powerful connection between farms and consumers.

"The more we become aware of what is happening to our food, the more interest everyone will take in finding better sources and learning more about how growing methods affect nutrition. Then we can create scale by bringing groups of people together, and you do that by building trust. When a family farm is the source of the knowledge and the experience, trust follows naturally."

Learn more about Heather and connect at dandhnewman.ca.



901 HWY 21, RIPLEY, ON N0G 2R0



Even the old shed door is cool in Lynne's garden. Unique bean varieties, custom fences made from old bed springs, a learning centre for children and experiments on everything from growing local tea to irrigation and how to use dandelions as mulch happen here.



the

BOTANIST

Meet Lynne Taylor. While no degree in botany hangs on her funky shed door at the Bruce Botanical Food Gardens (BBFG), her professional design and food policy background together with her affinity for the land, her knowledge of what grows here and, perhaps more importantly, what possibilities await are palpable as she reveals the nuances of this garden. *“Huron-Kinloss understood the long term vision of the social-tourism site we presented in the beginning and they stepped up to the plate to support this garden’s development.”* Together with a host of green-thumbed volunteers, the organization is set and ready to share their experience.

The Bruce Botanical Food Gardens is a laboratory of sorts. The purpose of the garden is to address food security in the region while demonstrating sustainable agriculture and showcasing rare food plants, and it all requires trial, error, ...and more trial. Persistence is a necessary trait of the people who toil here.

“We have a 15% level of food insecurity in 2016 which means almost 1 in 7 people don’t know where their next meal is coming from. So learning about food, how to grow it and use it is paramount to fighting food insecurity,” says Lynne. *“We are addressing that here because it’s one of the most important issues of our times. We are looking for different ways for individuals to produce good food. We are trying to take a leadership role in this field in this particular area of the County.”* The organization, referred to as the BBFG, was one of 50 organizations selected through Food Secure Canada to participate in a video feed of the United Nations report to Geneva on Canada’s report card on food security. *“It outlined the considerable amount of work we need to be undertaking. As a small community of 500+, we were honoured to be selected alongside the likes of Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto – all the big names – and there on the location map was Ripley. Imagine that!”*

The supportive nature of this community made it possible to bring Lynne’s vision to

life. Local volunteerism helps sustain it. It’s indeed the rare experience that draws tourists to this place and it is the donations received from the food produced here that help sustain it from year to year. From its reclaimed bed-spring fences to Mennonite art for chairs, the garden grows and flowers, and educates the young to old.

There’s even room for a business incubator, a space provided for a new food-based business where land, tools, resources and expertise are made available to help a fledgling business evolve. It is currently occupied by an ambitious individual specializing in hydroponics in an off-grid environment...no small feat.

“We need to encourage new farmers and new ways of farming. Those are some of the activities we undertake here. And when this business succeeds and moves on, we’ll find another agricultural entrepreneur and do it again. We need alternatives, we need more farm-to-fork business here and we need to heavily promote the Buy Local campaign.”

Lynne’s work is focused on exploring options that are more sustainable.

The BBFG is open to testing new ideas. For example, they participated in a new crop options project with okra and eggplant and this work spurred on the sweet potato trials undertaken by their Mennonite neighbours.

“We’re all learning – but if we can diversify what we grow and adapt to the changing population, cultures, and climate of this area, it will ensure continued success.” Lynne adds, *“We can become very set in our ways and reluctant to try new things. It’s difficult for farmers. There’s so much risk that they have to take on themselves. We can help take some of that risk away by doing the trial and error here.”*

The non-profit organization is also committed to educating young people because its board believes deeply that the next generation is where learning has the most impact. *“You engage an interest in gardening in a young child and you can change the course of their life by ensuring they can always feed themselves at the very basic level.”*

Upon moving to the area from the north, Lynne’s late husband, an economic development professional, kept ensuring her that the possibilities in this county were endless. Lynne said ‘show me’. *“Well he’s not here to experience our successes, but he was very right....the multitude of opportunities reveal themselves every day.”*

**Learn more about the
Bruce Botanical Gardens and
connect at bbfg.org**

 **62 PARK ST., RIPLEY, ON N0G 2R0**

the **TRADERS**



Think back to old black and white movies about pioneers – and the inevitable family trip to the general store to pick up supplies at the community trading post. Treats for the children, a new outfit for Mom, a selection of farm-fresh food and ingredients – all guided by the wisdom of caring proprietors. Lucknow – at the eastern entrance to Huron-Kinloss – is the region’s general store where tales and ideas are traded across wide streets full of friendly greetings. Every visit to Lucknow generates warm memories and another reason to return.





the CHEESEMAKER

Innovation is much more than a trendy yet empty word at Pine River Cheese & Butter Co-operative near Lake Huron. Free-thinking and differentiation through innovation inform the very existence of how the business is structured, its creativity and its ability to compete with giants in the dairy industry. Ulrike Prehn is the CEO who is leading change at this unique co-operative in Huron-Kinloss. It's a long way from the technology sector and her role in North American Product Management at Hewlett Packard, but she claims to now have the best commute to work "in the world". Snow-shoeing to work anyone?

Pine River Cheese is owned by local farmers who not only govern the co-operative but also produce the key ingredient (milk) used to make its award winning cheeses. The artisanal plant manager and lead craftsperson is from El Salvador. And CEO Prehn is of German decent, raised in farm country just down the road. This blend of local/international/craft thinking seems to be paying off.

"The cheese industry is full of big players who mass produce cheddar using mass produced ingredients like milk powder imported from the United States. We decided that it's silly for us to try to compete with that – so we also decided to be different. We have an artisanal plant here, new and state of the art. We have all the technology we need on the dairy and supply side – and all the skill we need now to make unique cheeses by hand. Why do what everyone else is doing? Pine River Cheese thrives by being different. And at this scale, that means being nimble, being comfortable in a state of change and leveraging our strength – the artisanal side of cheese making."

The innovative thinking at Pine River Cheese is attracting attention from retailers across Canada and that's good news. The new "Casa" line of Italian cheeses (Asiago and Pressato)

is a strong seller. They've launched their own Capra Nero goat cheese and the latest innovation – The Craft Beer Cheese Puck – drew rave reviews at a recent trade show in Montreal.

"The 300-gram craft beer cheese puck is as Canadian as hockey. That's a good fit. But so are our European cheeses because Canada is so diverse culturally. We invent our own recipes, we include local and regional partners like craft beer producers, and we stay as close to natural sources as we possibly can. Each of those decisions differentiates us."

Ulrike moved to Huron-Kinloss in stages, leaving the city life and moving further and further into the countryside. She preferred the lifestyle and finally made the big push to being back home permanently in 2013. So what does the future look like?

"For starters, we won't be having any black flies here – that's a big selling point (she's laughing)."

"But seriously, it's a lifestyle decision first. Then it's about food, anything to do with food production because you're so close to the source of such great raw product. You have the ability here to start small and be more





Left: Ulrike Prehn (right) and local dairy producer/ Pine River Cheese Board Chair Geoff Farrell (left) show off the product and the heroes of the production line - Jersey and Holstein cows.

Above: It all happens here: from the farm through the creativity of Pine River craftspeople to the shelf in Huron-Kinloss and in grocery stores all over.

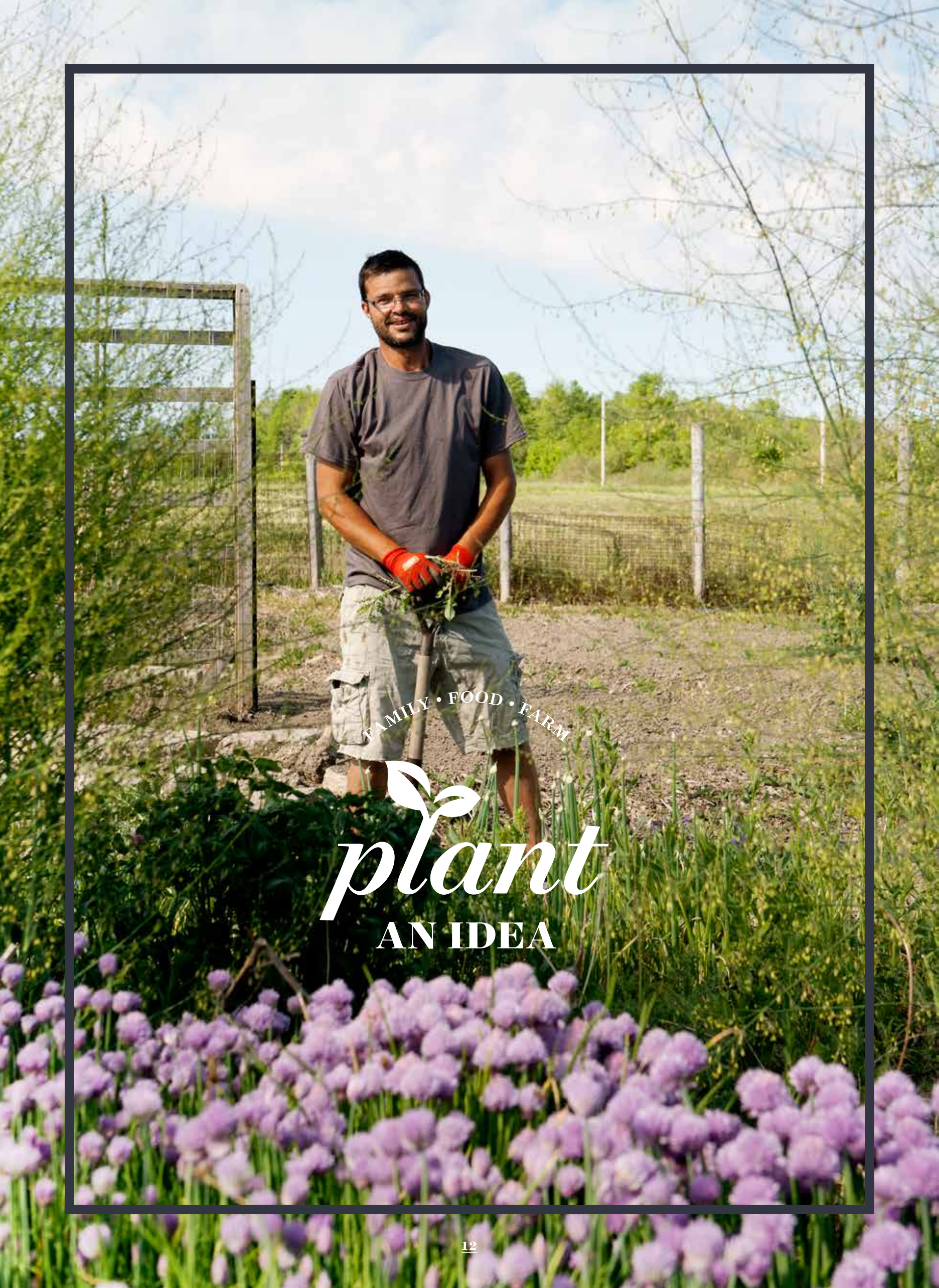
creative – and then to move faster than if you're working in the big corporate world. You don't have the obstacles here – the example is our Asiago cheese launch; everyone thought it couldn't be done here. I asked our cheese master if it could be done; he said sure, and boom, we have this amazing new product."

"You can do what you love here and as long as you have a vision, it's much easier to bring that vision to life. You can be a little quirky – you should be. You can find good creative people here and attract others. This is a blank canvas and that's the best news of all."

Learn more about Pine River Cheese and connect at pinerivercheese.com



635 ON-21, RIPLEY, ON N0G 2R0



FAMILY • FOOD • FARM

plant
AN IDEA



Here in what some call the agri-rich Back 40 of Bruce County, we grow things very well. Families grow here. Family-farms prosper. Our farms grow food you can trust. And our food inspires businesses: Co-ops, auctions, even a local botanical garden (think of it as our very own laboratory). While these elements are found individually elsewhere, this blend of everything in close proximity is the unique experience Huron-Kinloss offers.

So what would happen if the food producers and businesses of Huron-Kinloss could easily share that experience; both North into all of Bruce County and far afield – where farms are fewer and further between and freshness less trustworthy?

What if someone in Huron-Kinloss put all our experiential magic in a bottle? Or in a box on a shelf?

What if Huron-Kinloss created its own brand of food goodness; from our family farms to families everywhere? That might prove very interesting. So much so, that several business leaders and producers in the area are connecting the dots between what we grow and potential new markets. The group is looking at distribution, sharing resources – maybe even a unique Huron-Kinloss brand based on a family-farm-friendly value proposition. And the really good news is, you're invited to participate.

Plant your big ideas in Huron-Kinloss and get involved.

Contact Taralyn Cronin by email at tcronin@huronkinloss.com or by phone at (519) 395-3735 ext. 155



the **CULTIVATOR**

You won't see a picture of Elmer Brubacher in this story – his Mennonite faith guides him in other directions. So imagine a ready smile across a broad, sun-drenched face, big farmer's hands and a straw hat. That's Elmer. And be sure to experience his bright inner spirit that shows up with a laugh as you peruse his tomatoes, strawberries or beautiful flowers. Anyone who meets Elmer has a unique experience – like an on-going lesson in life dressed in faded overalls.



Left: Flowers, shrubs, the bounty of the land and Elmer's red wagon. Stopping here at Kinloss Produce is a moment that you won't forget.

This page: Inside the store, specialized Mennonite construction techniques are evident in every join; the taste of home-made jams and preserves is the only reason to stop admiring the woodwork.



Elmer and family chose this lifestyle about 20 years ago, and were founding members of the Produce Auction a few kilometers away near Lake Huron. He and others in the area banded together after years of shipping what they produced elsewhere.

"Bruce County got after us and wondered why we couldn't do an auction right here," says Elmer. "And we thought, good question. So they helped us set it up and the Auction is now a mainstay for farmers and buyers – it's one of the few fresh produce auctions in Ontario and people come from everywhere."

Elmer and his wife also run their own business called Kinloss Produce. Fruits and vegetables are the core products while his daughter does flowers and arrangements. It's a true family enterprise.

"We're not exactly on the beaten path – you have to look for us to find us," laughs Elmer. "But when you have a good product, people seek you out."

Kinloss Produce is about great food. Tomatoes and strawberries in season taste exactly the way they should. Elmer and family restrict pesticides and use 'beneficials' (like insects that naturally protect plants) to support the growing process.

"As a grandmother from Pennsylvania once told me, the closer you get your nose to the earth, the better it pays – what that means

is physically do your work. We follow that advice here and I think the results of our work taste better. You can buy beans that are machine picked at a big store, but people can tell the difference between those and beans that are picked by hand."

Elmer's physical work ethic doesn't preclude a lot of good thinking on the subject of what we grow and what we eat. Quite the opposite; *"I think we in North America are increasingly afraid of our own inventions, and now we're looking for more information about what we eat and how it's grown – that's the outcome of consumer unease. At Kinloss Produce and everywhere around this community, families grow food for families. You pay a little more than you'd pay for 'cheap food', but it's worth it."*

Elmer believes the future of growing food in Huron-Kinloss includes connecting more people outside the area to what families grow here.

"Necessity drives diversity – and that leads to sustainability. That's what we're trying to do here. We need to create demand for family food that is grown by families. That's the value-add. I'm interested in the welfare of everyone here, not just the Brubachers. If we can get more people involved, we can create demand and new opportunities for the community."

And off he walks, smiling that big smile, laughing as he turns away to help a customer pick just the right tomato.



 1404 GREY OX AVE, LUCKNOW, ON N0G 2H0

the

NOURISHER



Vicky and Roger Morrison own farmland just outside of Lucknow Ontario. It's one of the few remaining farms that still holds the same family name as the original Crown deeded in 1855. Generations are deeply rooted here on this century homestead with son Blair being the 5th farming generation here, collaborating with Mom and Dad on his part of the property. This is truly a family farm of creative diversity – while Roger raises cattle through winter, warmer weather brings something a little different. And that's what this is about...



“You come here to breathe”, says Vicky Morrison.

Life elsewhere is fast-paced and unrelenting at times. So as the sun warms the land in late spring, Vicky and Roger's farm transforms into the 100-acre Rural Retreat & Event Venue. It's a facility where life is celebrated and memories are made. People come for workshops, a culinary experience or a relaxing retreat – and maybe even Alpaca playtime.

“The most important thing here is that you learn to heal yourself while celebrating the small things that matter – those things that get lost in the day-to-day bustle,” says Vicky.

“We do focus a lot on food because that is the heart of who we are and what this area can give you – fresh whole food that you can taste and that truly nourishes the body and soul.”

Grassroots is a business idea that is continually evolving and growing to find new ways to help guests learn and unwind – like making your own beauty products from natural ingredients, taking a yoga class or simply sitting around a fire and listening to nature. Grassroots is also adding a wedding celebration component for couples that want a wedding that is simple and elegant with a hint of vintage charm.

“We do community events like Fired-Up Fridays: an evening of wood-fired Pizza and live music. We also offer whole food culinary workshops. Really there is something for everyone. Whether it's for a day of wellness or an evening of enjoyment, being here helps you to learn, heal and celebrate in all aspects

of your life. That's really what Grassroots is all about. “

“Helping people has always been a huge part of our family. Grassroots is an outward expression of that. This is what we do. You drive down our laneway and you naturally unwind. The true nature of this place offers you the opportunity to nourish the body, cultivate the mind and grow the spirit.”

Vicky is excited, about the wellness community that is emerging in the Huron-Kinloss area. Each small business has their own unique take on living naturally and sustainably. Grassroots is a perfect fit for whatever comes along. In alternative lifestyles, in farming, in how families co-exist and share. Vicky believes we're at the beginning of something new, a transition of sorts. And it all starts with a simple idea. Just breathe. Take it in and let nature do its work.

Learn more about Grassroots Rural Retreat at grassrootsruralretreat.com



760 BRUCE ROAD, 86, LUCKNOW, ON N0G 2H0

Left page and this page top: Vicky will tell you Alpacas jump and actually dance or twirl with life – yet they are soothing to be around and easy going. But do they like wood-fired pizza? We'll never know the answer because the humans got there first.

Right middle: Granddad shares time with the family on photography day. Shortly after this photo session, he sadly passed away at age 99 after a beautiful and rural-enriched life. Granddad's legacy lives on in Roger and Vicky and the children.



the **CROSSROADS**



Ripley is the balance point – an intersection if you will – between fresh water and family farms, past and future, simplicity and opportunity. This is the centre of Huron-Kinloss, a place where you can catch your breath or take advantage of rural tranquility. And as with all crossroads, Ripley offers you choices – to stay a little longer, explore a little further and perhaps discover a new direction that you hadn't considered before. Here at the crossroads of Huron-Kinloss, the potential to create something new is only limited by your imagination.

Ripley





Left: Family-made pastry simply tastes better when everything is rolled and filled with fresh strawberries. The gluten is optional, but the Ropp sisters (Juanita and Kaitlyn) never short-change the joy they bake into every bite.



the
BAKERS

Thirty plus years of marriage, an ever-present faith including Mennonite outreach, seven children, a dairy farm (and now lambs) - and since 2006, the strawberry tarts are front and centre while the bread dough is made fresh, every morning. This is the life of Larry and Susan Ropp and their family.

Susan and Larry Ropp bought Armstrong's Home Bakery and Bulk Food on the main street of Lucknow in 2006 - so named years ago after the founding family. Along with their 100-acre sheep farm, the bakery is central to Susan and Larry's life along with that of their children and their dedicated team - many of who have been at the bakery for over 15 years. This is truly a family business.

"We make food that tastes best in your kitchen at home; that's what it's for. That's why our team makes our bread dough from scratch every morning. No mixes - even our

gluten-free bread is made from scratch. But you have to order ahead because that goes fast these days. Everything you can get with gluten that tastes wonderful you can get without gluten and it tastes just as good."

Armstrong's Bakery sells pies, tarts, bread, cookies, muffins - all fresh, every day, all from a recipe binder that Susan keeps close. The bakers make their own fillings from scratch too, often with the produce she finds at the local auction.

"When you get your rhubarb fresh, just after being picked, it tastes better - that's just a fact. You know where it comes from, you

know it's been grown without any foreign additives. It's better because it's grown here. And baked like you would at home."

It's a busy life out there. In here at Armstrong's, they take their time. *"This is food made the way our mothers and grandmothers made it - it's meant to be enjoyed with family. It's slow food - that's what it is."*



644 CAMPBELL ST., LUCKNOW, ON N0G 2H0

the **BEACHES**



Nestled on the western edge of Huron-Kinloss you'll find a beach, pails for making sand castles and the nostalgia of a Lake Huron lighthouse. The warmth of the community is reflected in the colour of the sunsets - the urge to linger here is inescapable. Set the explorer in you free by visiting Point Clark in Huron-Kinloss.





ripley

Nourish your inner explorer...

point clark

lucknow

If all of Bruce County is where explorers discover nirvana, Huron-Kinloss in southern-most Bruce is where they nourish their souls. Our trails come with ice cream. Our farms are family-friendly and our sunsets are as alluring as any you'll find. This is home to fresh produce by the bushel, welcome smiles and the aroma of fresh-made and baked daily in town. Be honest - all the hiking, kayaking, walking and exploring builds an appetite for something a little different. You'll discover that too, in the communities of Huron-Kinloss.

For more information about Huron-Kinloss, visit huronkinloss.com

