

Local Food Week showcases the importance of supporting local farmers

By **Jessica Laurenza**

June 7-13 is Ontario's local food week ? an opportunity to celebrate, appreciate and support fresh, healthy, home-grown food.

Ontario is home to about 49,600 farms and 4,400 food processing facilities, contributing over \$47 billion to the provincial GDP, according to the 2021 Local Food Report. Out of all the food produced in the province, 60 per cent of it is consumed here too.

A large part of supporting local farms and food businesses is understanding what local foods are available, as well as how and where to obtain them. The Ontario government is aiming to increase involvement in local foods through a variety of initiatives.

?Local farms are at the heart and soul of the good things that grow in Ontario,? explains Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

?The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us just how critical local food is to our province,? says Hardeman. ?Our agri-food sector has kept grocery store shelves full over the past year and Ontarians have become more aware of the role farmers play in our daily lives and in our economy.?

Pfisterer Farm's Farm School Agrigation in Wellington County is an online platform with short videos to teach students from grade one through three about local agriculture, making it easy for teachers to tie this into their curriculum. You can visit pfistererfarm.com to engage in different educational farm-based videos.

Jim and Leslie Forsythe of Durham Region take children on a virtual field trip to embody the sights and sounds of their farm. They've developed interactive videos that allow kids to virtually visit farm animals and investigate the journey of food. You can visit forsythefamilyfarms.com to download activity sheets to accompany each educational video.

Tyler Brooks, Director of Communications and Stakeholder Relations at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), encourages everyone to reflect on the reliability and strength of Ontario's agri-food sector.

The OFA is also working on a project called Six by Sixteen, a food literacy initiative which aims to help youth prepare six local sourced meals by the time they turn 16 to ensure their generation of consumers understands the value of local products.

The campaign will educate youth of where their food comes from, how to cook it and the importance of supporting locally. It will be aired on CTV and recipes can be found at sixbysixteen.me.

When you support local farmers, you not only support employment opportunities within the sector, you support the economic growth and prosperity that the industry brings to the province. There are more than 650 agri-food businesses in Ontario and most can be identified by a green Foodland logo.

Shop local and celebrate Local Food Week the first week of every June!