

LOCAL FARE

Chef sings the praises of Holland Marsh

Jamie Kennedy delights in freshness, variety of farming area's produce

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If you could put Ontario's most fertile farming zone, the Holland Marsh, in a bowl, here's what it might contain: romaine lettuce, radishes, parsley, celery root, carrots, summer savoury, tomatoes and artichoke hearts, generously drizzled with shallot vinaigrette.

Here's how it would taste: Delicious, exotic and, most of all, fresh.

At least, that's how it turns out when famed chef Jamie Kennedy interprets the concept of eating locally.

Paying homage to Ontario's most productive agricultural region yesterday, he tossed a salad made from veggies grown in the Holland Marsh, a former lake bed less than an hour north of Toronto, and served it to media at his new Corktown boîte, Gilead Café.

As well, Kennedy sent salads to Premier Dalton McGuinty and Julia Munro, MPP for York-Simcoe, which includes the Holland Marsh.

"The list really got me excited," says the chef, referring to a selection of 30 ingredients available from the area's 150 farmers. "It's really outside the ken of traditional farming," he says, noting that 20 years ago, the Holland Marsh was mainly producing carrots, onions

and celery, which store well and can therefore provide income for farmers for 10 months of the year.

"They used to have five or 10 things; now it's exploding," says Kennedy, pointing out that his Holland Marsh salad contains carrots of four colours: orange, red, white, yellow.

The salad was intended to help the Holland Marsh Growers Association celebrate its recent \$400,000 grant from Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, which was created in 2005 to foster growth in the 728,000-hectare farming zone that surrounds the Golden Horseshoe.

The Holland Marsh Growers Association will use the grant to support its farmers to better serve the local market and develop a recognizable brand.

Strengthening the local food supply chain presents challenges, but it's in everybody's best interest, says Roman Dyriw, a second-generation farmer who produces mainly carrots and onions.

"It would be a shame for the consumer to not take advantage of the local produce that's available," he says. "It's a win-win situation. We like the stability of the local market. Export markets may or not be there, but the GTA eats every day, regardless of the economy."



While Dyriw depends on the tried-and-true veggies, others are experimenting. Farmer John Gonzo, for example, grows lettuces, beets, radishes and sprouts. Some of his produce appeared in Kennedy's salad.

Consumers benefit from a local food supply chain in the short term because Ontario growers are experts at food safety, says Jamie Reaume, executive director for the Holland Marsh association. In the long term, local produce can help to stabilize Ontario's food supply.

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local market

FARMER **ROMAN DYRIW**

“For decades, retailers have been providing a wealth of produce from around the world. But, as a nation, if you can't feed yourself, you don't have the right to call yourself a nation. If we were ever to need to close our borders, where do we turn?”

High gas prices add to the motivation to develop local food distribution, Reaume adds.

But while the locavore trend is arising out of modern economic and social pressures, it's not a revolutionary idea. Making local produce available to consumers is ac-

tually a matter of recovering lost practices.

“Thirty years ago, the first strawberry you ate was from Ontario,” says Reaume. “I remember a time when people used to go apple picking. It's the crunch of eating an apple right off the tree. . . . It's a simple pleasure that we're missing out on.”

For proof, look to Kennedy's salad, which contains vegetables picked less than 24 hours before consumption and bursts with juicy flavour.

Unfortunately, Kennedy has no immediate plans to include the salad on the menu at Gilead Café, but it might appear at some point at Jamie Kennedy at the Gardiner or JK Wine Bar.