

The Local Yokel

Volume #10

By April Cappel

Luscious, ripe, juicy and sweet big red tomatoes; long, firm, cool and green sliced fresh cucumbers; dark, rich, leafy and crisp, home grown lettuce.

Now before you put down the paper, and go make a salad or a sandwich, take a minute to keep reading, and let me give you some “food for thought”!

We live in a County that is agriculture based. That means we produce **food**. We farm cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry. We farm wheat, corn, sunflowers, hemp and many other fascinating seeds and grains.

We also have **many, many** fabulous garden market producers who produce everything from lettuce to organic heirloom vegetables or hemp based frozen desserts. This of course doesn't, account for the numerous honey and maple syrup producers or other “produced” food products you kind find in our bountiful county either.

So, why, with such a vast resource of agriculture, would it be hard to find such wonderful produce in Renfrew County?

This is the question I found myself wondering, after meeting one of Renfrew County's most recent up and coming entrepreneurs found their way into the Upper Ottawa Chamber of Commerce early last week. She came in to find out about membership, but, with the “Local Yokel” onsite, I was put to the task to help her locate some of this county's agricultural resources.

April Robinson is the mastermind behind one of the county's most interesting aspects of the service industry to recently make its debut in Eganville.

She is “Chef April” of “Empty Pantry Solutions”, a unique service that offers at home cuisine for every occasion including the birth of a new baby, to recent requirements for dietary changes, like needing to accommodate a diabetic diet or the like. She will also cater to seniors, or, just because!

Imagine, that romantic, at home candle light dinner, that *you didn't* have to cook, and isn't out of a box but is comparable to a gourmet meal you might pay a fortune for in a restaurant!

Chef April prefers to cook with local, organic produce whenever possible. If her personality translates well to her cooking, I have no doubt that you won't be disappointed in her labours.

As I mentioned a little earlier, we live in a bountiful, productive agriculture based county. Why is it so difficult to find things that are locally produced? Why does the average meal travel 2400km before it sits in front of us to enjoy?

Considering the environmental impact of this travel, these are questions we should be spending some time pondering.

That is a question that the newly forming “Ottawa Valley Food Cooperative” is attempting to remedy.

“The Ottawa Valley Food Cooperative formed out of a desire for a local food system and sustainable production practices. A local community marketplace serves local farmers, consumers and their communities. Family farms are able to earn a living as farmers. Local economies do benefit from having money re-circulate and multiply.” These are words from the “Vision” of the Co-op.

Could this food cooperative be the answer to Chef April's problems? Well, I guess that would depend on you, the consumer.

Right now, the co-op is looking for local producers as well as a list of what local foods consumers would like to have available.

So, if you are a local producer, like the ones we find on various morning in various communities, up at the crack of dawn and setting up at the local Farmer's Market, or a Farm Gate producer of any type, be it herbs, eggs, beef, **WHATEVER!** Or - if you are a consumer, like Chef April, I urge you to contact the Coop and learn more. (That is exactly what I suggested she should do!)

You can do this by going to www.ottawavalleyfoods.org

If you would like more information on Chef April and the Empty Pantry Solutions, go to www.emptypantrysolutions.ca or call Chef April at 613.628.3540.

The "Local Yokel" needs your help! I am looking for information regarding businesses in Renfrew County who are offering programs for children over the summer holidays. If you can help, please email me at buy_local@nrtco.net