



Local Harvest

Foodlink Waterloo Region • Issue 18 • December 2005

Features

Farm Profile:
Pfenning's Organic
Vegetables Inc.

Fresh in Focus:
Carrot Shtick!

Finding locally grown
carrots in Waterloo
Region



FOODLINK
218 Dawson St.
Waterloo, ON
N2L 1S4
(519) 747-7641

www.foodlink.ca

**Local Harvest
content, layout and
editing:**

Peter Katona

Carmen Everest-Wahl

Nina Bailey-Dick

Wendy Koch

Local Farm Profile: Pfenning's Organic Vegetables Inc.

(Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map Listing # 44)

When agricultural chemicals were introduced to German farmers in the early part of the 20th century, the Pfenning family—like most of their neighbours—were quick to embrace them. The Pfenning's took note of the increased yield that came with the modern methods. However, by the early 1950's, Wilhelm Pfenning began to suspect that the benefits may come with costs. Concerned that his health may be at risk and that the nutritional value of the crops may be compromised, Wilhelm began to consider reverting to "organic" farming. Despite challenges, the Pfenning's were able to make the shift to farming free of chemicals in 1965 and they have been committed to organics ever since.

In the 1970's, a new challenge presented itself. The family homestead stood directly in the path of a new Autobahn (highway). After a lengthy battle with the West German Autobahn Commission, Wilhelm and Barnhild Pfenning made the decision to move their family from the small Bavarian village and relocate to Canada. They bought land near New Hamburg, Ontario and established an organic farm—maintaining both ties to agriculture and to an organic way of life.

Today, Pfenning's Organic Farm grows 200 acres of vegetables on two separate properties and employs 20-30 people. Pfenning's also includes an on-farm packing house to store and package local organic produce, supplying health food stores in KW, Guelph, Toronto and other nearby cities. Pfenning's organic vegetables can also be found in the larger grocery stores like Zehrs, Valumart, and Your Independent Grocery. Here in our backyard is Ontario's largest organic vegetable grower!

Despite its size, the farm remains a family business. Two of Wilhelm and Barnhild's four children (sons



Grading the carrot harvest

Ekkehard and Wolfgang) now manage the farm with their spouses (Jenn and Regina). One of their daughters (Almut) also owns and runs the Pfenning's Organic and More store in nearby St. Agatha. When asked how the family divides all the work, Ekk's wife Jenn laughs and explains that their roles are very flexible, decision-making is shared and they often make up ever-evolving titles for themselves. Primarily, Wolfgang manages the field work while Ekkehard manages the purchasing and marketing of off-farm products. Other family members contribute to the family business by making deliveries, managing employees, serving the traditional 9AM coffee break, making sauerkraut, harvesting, washing and packing produce, and much much more. The older children of the third generation of Pfenning's (ages 12-8) join in the transplanting,

continued on page 2



Local Farm Profile continued

but they help in many other ways as well. They run errands to the fields, bring water to the crew, help sort product or pack it into boxes, label the boxes with the lot numbers and product information, and sometimes even help pack the orders for shipping.

Despite all this work and the fact that they receive higher prices for organic produce, the Pfenning's wonder if the farm would remain profitable if they had to make mortgage payments on top of the other expenses of farming. Prices for produce have changed little in the last 50 years while the prices for land, equipment, and fuel have skyrocketed. Perhaps the time has come for farmers to get together and charge a (higher) price that is fair to them. As Jenn Pfenning points out "We can't wait for the world to come knocking at our door offering money". Although the marketplace is ultra-competitive, farms also have to consider the value of their effort and add it into the cost of production. If a farmer doesn't know what it costs to produce a pound of butter, how can the farmer know what to charge?"

Despite their passion for sustainable farming, the Pfenning family is uncertain that organic production will ever be mainstream since "too many people do not care." People expect to buy food at prices cheaper than farmers can produce it. Like most farmers, the Pfenning's aren't expecting handouts, rather they want people to value what they do. "We want a fair price for our produce." Unfortunately our culture doesn't seem to value food enough. That's why events to promote local food like (Foodlink's) Taste Local! Taste Fresh! are so important."

The Pfenning's are committed to buying and selling local "certified organic" produce whenever possible. If it is available locally, they do not bring in imports—period. "This is absolute! We always push local first with our customers." The challenge lies in the need to do business with wholesalers who do not prioritize local. On their website you can see a letter the Pfenning's wrote to their customers and suppliers clarifying their commitment to do business with customers and suppliers who share their philosophy of sustainability (including prioritiz-



ing local) and healthy eating. This has led them to market and deliver directly to stores rather than depend on wholesalers who may not share this goal. The Pfenning's are clear that they will only package imports when local supply is exhausted.

The Pfenning's main crops are carrots, potatoes and onions. Jenn tells a story of how she sent heart-shaped carrot slices as Valentine's Day treats to her children's classes. One mother phoned her up afterward and asked her "What did you do to your carrots?!" Her daughter who did not like carrots had come home from school gushing about the delicious carrots the Pfenning child brought to share. Do Pfenning's carrots taste better than other carrots? The family explains that the taste of carrots depends on many factors including the variety of the seed, the soil type, wetness of the soil and the time of day it was harvested. Carrots should never be harvested in bright sun as the sugar goes to the leaves in bright sun. The Pfenning's grow an Emperor type of carrot, raise it in healthy soil, pick it at the right time, AND store the carrots properly just a degree or less above freezing. If carrots get warm or dry they become bitter but she warns that floating your carrot sticks in water is not a good idea as many vitamins leach into the water.

Although they grew 35 acres of carrots this year, the Pfenning's supply is almost gone. If you hurry to a small local store such as The Pfenning's Organic and More, Eating Well Organically, The Old Kitchen Cupboard, or the Natural Food Market you can still buy local Pfenning's carrots in 2 or 5lb bags. Other local Pfenning's vegetables to look for are carrots, potatoes and onions, lettuce, spinach, kale, collards, parsley, dandelion, chard, broccoli, beets, parsnips, turnips and rutabagas. The Pfenning's store offers a unique service where they deliver local organic produce to your door! Go to their website www.pfenningorganic.com to order this service and find information including more great photos, newsletters and the family history of this local jewel.



Carrot Trivia

The carrot (*Daucus carota*) gets its name from the French word *carotte*, which in turn comes from the Latin *carota*.

In the Middle Ages, the feathery leaves of carrots were placed in a woman's hair as decoration. Carrot juice was used to make butter a more appealing color.

During the Second World War, the carrot was widely used as a substitute for scarce vegetables and fruits. Carrolade was a drink made from strained carrot and turnip juices. Carrot marmalade and toffee carrots satisfied a sweet tooth.

The longest carrot in recorded history (1996) was 16'10 1/2" long. The heaviest known carrot (1998) was 18.99 pounds!

My Kids' Favourite Carrots

Recipe provided by Jennifer Pfenning

Ingredients:

- 5 large carrots peeled
- 1/4 cup sunflower or pumpkin seeds
- 2 tbsp breadcrumbs
- 1 tbsp FlorAlp Sunflower oil (or your favourite nut oil)

Preparation:

Julienne the carrots and steam. While carrots are steaming heat the oil on medium in a small fry pan. Add the pumpkin or sunflower seeds and stir lightly till toasted and slightly puffed. Add bread crumbs and continue stirring lightly till bread crumbs are toasted. Remove from heat and set aside. Drain carrots and toss with Seed and breadcrumb mixture. Serve immediately. Serves 5-6 people. *This recipe can also be modified by adding sour cream, pepper or any other spice that goes with carrots.*



Carrot Schtick!

When a young child draws an orange triangle with a few green spikes on top, there are few people who wouldn't recognize it as a carrot. Indeed, the carrot is perhaps the most recognizable and preferred vegetable



anywhere in the world. However, the bright orange fleshy root vegetable we know today as the carrot is a far cry from its wild ancestor, a small tough, pale fleshed, acrid root plant. The carrot belongs to the Umbelliferae family, and is recognizable by its feathery leaves as a relative of parsley, dill, fennel, celery, and the wildflower Queen Anne's Lace, a close relative of the original carrot root. In fact, garden carrots that run to seed soon revert to their wild prototype, with a forking carrot-smelling, edible root that quickly becomes too woody and bitter to eat.

To unravel the long history of the carrot you have to go back about 5,000 years when the root was found to be growing in the area now known as Afghanistan. At this time, the root was of a purple or lavender colour. Early Arab travelers trading in Asia and Africa brought back purple carrot seeds and began propagating them along the southern Mediterranean. Moorish invaders are thought to have brought the purple and yellow variety from North Africa to Southern Europe around the 12th century. By

the 13th century carrots are known to have grown in the fields of Germany and France. Flemish refugees eventually introduced the vegetable to the shores of England in the 15th century. During these years the veg-

etable appeared in a variety of hues ranging from purple to white, pale yellow, red, green and black, but never orange!

Orange roots, containing the pigment carotene, were not noted until the 16th century in Holland. This only came about thanks to patriotic Dutch growers who bred the vegetable to grow in the colours of the House of Orange. By the 1700s

Holland was considered the leading country in carrot breeding and today's "modern" orange version is directly descended from the Dutch-bred carrots of this time.

Nutritional Value

Vitamin A is derived from beta-carotene and carrots are the leading source of this nutrient in the North American diet. In fact, carotenoids, the group of plant pigments of which beta-carotene is a member, are so named because they were first identified in carrots. The beta-carotene in carrots is an anti-oxidant that fights free radicals contributing to conditions like cancer, stroke, heart disease and macular degeneration. Carrots also contain another anti-oxidant called alpha-carotene that may protect against lung cancer. Carrots are by far one of the richest sources of carotenoids—just one cup provides twice the recommended daily allowance.

This ever-popular vegetable is also a source of disease-fighting flavonoids, and carrots contain a specific type of fiber, called calcium pectate, which may lower blood

cholesterol. In addition these powerhouse veggies boost immunity, especially among older people, reduce photosensitivity, help heal minor wounds and injuries, cleanse the liver, help fight infection, help fight anemia, reduce acne, fight bronchitis and improve the health of muscle, flesh, and skin.

With the exception of beets, carrots contain more sugar than any other vegetable, which makes them a satisfying snack eaten raw and a tasty addition to a variety of cooked dishes.

Many markets sell carrots in bunches with their tops still on, but usually at a higher price than bagged carrots. Some consumers see the tops as an indication of freshness, which indeed they are—if crisp and bright green. However, refrigeration and moisture-retaining packaging are the best preservers of freshness: If carrots are displayed unwrapped at room temperature, they will lose sweetness and crispness, with or without their leafy crown.

Carrots Protect your Vision

We have all heard at some point that we should eat our carrots to maintain good eyesight. There is much truth to this old adage and the contributing factor is, once again, beta-carotene. After beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A in the liver, it travels to the retina of the eye where it is transformed into rhodopsin, a purple pigment that is necessary for night-vision.

Buying, Storing, and Preparing

Carrot roots should be firm, smooth, relatively straight and bright in color. The deeper the orange-color, the more beta-carotene is present in the carrot. Avoid carrots that are excessively cracked or forked as well as those that are limp or rubbery since they are signs of age. The top, or "shoulder," may be tinged with green, but should not be dark or black, further indications of age. If the green tops are attached, they should be brightly colored, feathery and not wilted.

Carrots are hardy vegetables that will keep



longer than many others if stored properly. The trick to preserving the freshness of carrot roots is to minimize the amount of moisture they lose. To do this, make sure to store them in the coolest part of the refrigerator in a perforated plastic bag or wrapped in a paper towel, which will reduce the amount of condensation that is able to form. They

should be able to keep fresh for about two weeks. Carrots should also be stored away from apples, pears, potatoes and other fruits and vegetables that produce ethylene gas since it will cause them to become bitter

If you buy carrots with “tops,” twist or cut off the leaves before storing as moisture will be drawn from the roots, turning them limp and rubbery.

Although bagged carrots usually look clean, bacteria from the soil may be present on the surface. So whether eating the carrots raw or cooking them, be sure to scrub them with a vegetable brush under running water, or peel them with a swivel-bladed vegetable peeler or paring knife; then rinse thoroughly.

Most people enjoy crunching on raw carrots. However, cooking them briefly for three to four minutes breaks down the tough cellular walls and makes their nutrients (including beta-carotene) more accessible.


Baby Carrots

What started out in the late 1980s as an operation to produce small carrots for frozen food entrees, turned into an explosive love for bite-size, raw carrots. Contrary to popular belief, baby carrots are not carrots picked earlier than their large cousins. They come from long, slender carrots, which are cut into two-inch pieces and then peeled into a rounded shape. Today they are the most popular “variety” of carrots in the marketplace!

Carrot production in Ontario

One of Canada’s biggest carrot producing areas is Bradford, Ontario (north of Newmarket), where every year the Annual Carrot Fest takes place.

Production of Carrots in Ontario (2004)

7750 acres (3136 Ha)
 250,340,000 pounds (113,552 tonnes)
 6.8 cents/lb (150.6 \$/tonne)
 Farm value of \$17,101,000 



Finding Locally Grown Carrots in Waterloo Region

If you’re looking for carrots why not consult Foodlink’s Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. The 2005 edition features a number of farms close by that grow and sell them. Some farms may still have stock on hand. Over the winter months, call first to check for availability.



Aberle Farms
 2639 Northfield Dr. E., Elmira
 Tel. 669-2097



Gillespie’s Garden
 1043 Brantford Hwy. (Hwy. 24 S.),
 Cambridge
 Tel. 622-2294



Nauman’s Raspberries Galore
 3250 Hessen St., St. Clements
 Tel. 699-5524



James and Rosann Albrecht
Special producers for Fairshare Harvest CSA
 Fairshare Harvest Tel. 595-4841



Herrle’s Country Farm Market
 1243 Erb’s Rd., St. Agatha
 Tel. 886-7576



Pfennings Organic Vegetables Inc.
 1209 Waterloo St., Baden
 Tel. 662-3460



Joel Bauman
 1764 King St. N. St. Jacobs
 Tel. 664-3093



Clarence and Edna Knorr
 2477 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo
 Tel. 699-4007



Rare Organics
 1679 Blair Rd., Blair
 Tel. 650-9336



Brubacher Produce
 1562 Halm Rd., West Montrose
 Tel. 664-3214



Allen and Lovina Martin
 7140 Line 86, Elmira
 Tel. 669-1693



J. Steckle Heritage Homestead
 811 Bleams Rd., Kitchener
 Tel. 748-4690



Floralane Produce
 2191 Arthur St. North, Elmira
 Tel. 669-3167



John B. Martin
 1090 Reitzel Place, St. Jacobs
 Tel. 664-3253



Weber’s Family Farm
 2844 Lobsinger Line, St. Clements
 Tel. 699-6025