

Author's odyssey discovers a new wave of Canadian farmers

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Recipe: Tunnel of Ambrosia Cake

She might very well be a poet, a novelist, a screenwriter, a journalist and journalism instructor, but there's dirt to be found in Margaret Webb's past.

She grew up on a farm just outside Barrie, Ont. and that is what prompted her to criss-cross Canada on a farm odyssey, discovering a new wave of pioneering Canadian farmers. She writes about her discoveries in the recently released *Apples To Oysters: A Food Lover's Tour of Canadian Farms*. Lively and entertaining with flashes of humour, the book is a collage of passion and excitement of a new generation of farmers.

Prince Edward Island oysters, New Brunswick dulse, Nova Scotia scallops, an experimental cod fish farm in Newfoundland, humane pork producers in Manitoba -- Webb marches across Canada, visiting innovative and socially conscious farmers.

She stops in B.C. to chomp on apples, in particular those called Ambrosia -- "Canada's most exciting new variety" -- and to visit Sally and Wilfrid Mennell, who grow them in the Similkameen Valley.

"It takes me a minute to realize that Wilfrid is talking about one of my favourite subjects -- sex," Webb writes about her B.C. encounter with apples. "I had never thought of apple trees as having sex, but they do, much like humans do, only with a little help from the bees, of course."

And in Summerland, at the Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre, she meets a zealous apple research scientist, tending some 30,000 apple trees, bred from 250 different parents.

"There's a lot of farting and burping that goes on," says a research technician, describing the effects of testing so many apples.

It's a lively read.

Here is a recipe from *Apples To Oysters*, created by Karen Barnaby of The Fish House for a contest hosted by Ambrosia apple growers.

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