

What it takes to feed us well

JULIAN ARMSTRONG

Freelance

Saturday, May 31, 2008

Stories about the troubles endured by Canadian farmers grab us by the heartstrings, but now there is a book to grab our attention as if to a family drama. Or, to be exact, 11 dramas, because the author of *Apples to Oysters: A Food Lover's Tour of Canadian Farms* takes us on a personal visit to food-producing homesteads from coast to coast to coast.

Margaret Webb, a Toronto journalist and fiction writer raised on a farm, chose farms typical of each region, and inserted herself into the farmers' lives. She brings us first-hand stories of such varied individuals as Quebec cheesemakers, British Columbia apple growers, Prince Edward Island oyster harvesters and Sask-atchewan grain farmers.

The lively stories of these committed entrepreneurs and their battles with big business, regulatory controls, the weather and - often - exhaustion stayed with me long after I laid this well-written, carefully researched little book aside.

I'll never tuck into creamy Riopelle cheese again without thinking of the Île aux Grues couple who raise cattle on St. Lawrence River marshlands, milk them in a spotless barn and provide the dairy co-operative with milk Webb compared to the richest of milkshakes. I'll pay the difference to buy beef raised out on the Alberta plains instead of meat from animals given the congested feedlot treatment. And I'll watch for new varieties of apples after reading about developments in B.C. orchards and the accidental discovery of the Ambrosia, a variety that could one day appear next to the McIntosh.

With food prices expected to rise, Webb's explanation of what it takes to feed us well is both timely and entertaining.

APPLES TO OYSTERS: A FOOD LOVER'S TOUR OF CANADIAN FARMS

By Margaret Webb

Viking Canada,

272 pages, \$34

© The Gazette (Montreal) 2008

[CLOSE WINDOW](#)