

## Stories fresh from the farm

### Author travels country telling farmers' tales

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There's no room for boring in Margaret Webb's view of farming. And it has very little to do with being raised on an Innisfil farm, although it naturally had a significant impact on her life.

No, it's more to do with a love of food. That's what inspired Webb to travel across Canada, visit farmers and write about their lives and what they grew.

Their stories -- and more -- are included in her first book, *Apples to Oysters: A Food Lover's Tour of Canadian Farms*.

Since its April release in Toronto, where Webb currently lives, her life has been a whirlwind. She will be in Dalston, at the Eco-Farmers' Market, next Friday to read from and sign copies of her book.

"People sometimes think, 'Farm/farmer, oh that's boring.' I don't think they realize what an incredible adventure it is to go into a food region and discover Canada through the eyes of the farmer. I think people have been really surprised at how adventuresome the stories are," said Webb, who experienced it for herself, riding round up with organic cowboys for example.

"It's a story for grownups, so there's lots of crazy stories about the sex life of animals, and it's a bit of a travelogue of Canada."

In *Apples to Oysters*, Webb sets out to visit 11 farms, located across the county, each producing something different.

In Quebec, she wrote about artisan cheeses. In Ontario, she zeroed in on ice wines from Henry of Pelham Winery -- chosen because she felt its story linked up very closely with that of her own family. She also felt it was an inspiring tale for farmers, and a potential model of where farming should go in the future -- to have control of the production of food from beginning to end.

Pelham, for example, does it all. Grows the grapes, makes the wine, markets and sells it.

The book also includes a smattering of recipes. Throughout, Webb interweaves the story of her own life, growing up on a farm that grew corn and beef, and what happened to it over the years. The north Innisfil farm is still in the family, and her brother, Graham, currently takes care of it. But, it is for sale.

Even though *Apples to Oysters* is Webb's first book, she has had poetry published in various anthologies and is a full-time writer. She's even worked on two screenplays for Walt Disney Studios. She currently teaches magazine writing part-time at Ryerson University, and writes on a variety of topics for national magazines and newspapers.

It was while she was working on a travel piece on the East Coast that the idea to write this book first occurred to her.

"We were (eating) this amazing salad in this restaurant. It didn't have any dressing on it, barely anything on it -- it was the greens themselves. We went, 'Wow these are the best greens we've ever had. What's going on?'" Webb recalls.

By coincidence, the farmer who

grew the greens was at the restaurant that day to make a delivery, and Webb not only met him, but also talked to him about his farming technique and visited his farm where they tasted a carrot, pulled from the compost, the earth shaken off.

"It was fabulous," she said. "It really reminded me of the food I ate growing up on my family's farm that my mother grew in her garden. The idea popped into my head: wouldn't it be amazing to go across Canada, discover farmers who are putting the quality and taste back into food."

Webb will be at Eco-Farmers' Market in Dalston, July 11, from 3 p. m. to 5 p. m. She is expected to talk about her book at 4 p. m. Copies of Apples to Oysters will be available for purchase and signing.

Contact the writer at

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The Eco-Farmers' Market

The Eco-Farmers' Market is located outdoors on the grounds of Hempola Farms, at the corner of Highway 93 and Forbes Road, north of Barrie. From Highway 400, take the Forbes Road exit, or take Highway 93 north from the intersection with Highway 11, just past Barrie.

The market averages around 15 vendors who use sustainable farming methods to produce everything from free-range pork, grass-fed beef, poultry and lamb to vegetables, salad greens, fruit as well as herbs and garlic. Additional items include baking, preserves, honey, maple syrup and hemp products.

Market vendors come from all over Simcoe County, and many individual farmers also sell products from their farms on a year-round basis -- some delivery, too. The market runs every Friday until Thanksgiving, and is open from mid-afternoon to dusk.

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