



Canadian Organic Growers  
OTTAWA REGION NEWSLETTER

Winter 2010

# Down to Earth

## Organic Veggie Gardening Workshop Series 2010

### FOUR WORKSHOPS

- Learn secrets of organic gardening from master organic gardeners
- Grow healthy, organic veggies for you and your family
- Learn to grow veggies in your own backyard or in a community garden
- Network with other gardeners and share experiences and tips
- Register for individual workshops or for the whole series



#### 1. Organic Principles and All About Soil

March 3, 2010 *or* April 28, 2010

#### 2. Seeds: Pricking Out, Growing On, Transplanting to the Garden

March 10, 2010 *or* May 5, 2010

#### 3. Essentials of Backyard and Allotment Gardening

March 24, 2010 *or* May 12, 2010

Includes Organic Vegetable Growing in the yard or allotment garden and The Organic Approach to Garden, Weeds, and Insects

#### 4. Gardening on the Patio or Balcony

March 24, 2010 *or* May 12, 2010

- When:** Wednesdays 7:30-9:30 pm (two-hour workshops)  
**Where:** Sandy Hill Community Centre, 250 Somerset St. East, Ottawa  
**Cost:** Residents of Ottawa \$19 per workshop, Non-residents \$23.75 per workshop, 10% discount for seniors (65 and over). Fees subject to change by City of Ottawa.  
**Registration:** Sandy Hill Community Centre  
 Telephone: 613-564-1062 (first come, first served)  
 Registration opens January 15, 2010 (winter workshops) and March 16, 2010 (spring workshops).

Disabled persons are asked to indicate assistance needed at time of registration.

For more information, visit [www.cog.ca/ottawa](http://www.cog.ca/ottawa) or call 613-244-4000. Courses sponsored by City of Ottawa and COG-Ottawa.

### Editor's Corner

Early December has arrived, the holidays are just around the corner, and yet we've only seen a few flakes of snow. It seems that Mother Nature has decided to make up for the cool and rainy weather we had this summer, and the fall has been absolutely beautiful. I'll admit that I have as much of a soft spot as many Canadians do for a white Christmas, but I'm pretty happy not to have to remember my mittens when I take my dog out for a walk! Here's hoping it holds off at least a few more days.

Once again, this issue of *Down to Earth* is full of exciting news and things that COG-Ottawa's members have been up to over the past few months. I had the opportunity to chat with Novella Carpenter, author of *Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer*, over e-mail about her book and her experiences. She was a pleasure to work with and more than happy to share with *Down to Earth's* readers. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed doing the research.

I hope this note finds you recovering from a fantastic holiday season and resting up for the spring!

Cheers,

Laura

[downtoeartheditor@gmail.com](mailto:downtoeartheditor@gmail.com)

### INSIDE — P.3

Read about COG-Ottawa's Annual General Meeting, held November 29.

*A delicious spread was enjoyed by all.*

Photo credit: David Townson.



### Food For All Project — COG-Ottawa participants needed

Workshops will be held in the first half of 2010 to plan this Ottawa city-wide project facilitated by Just Food and the University of Ottawa. Can you participate in one of the following workshop series on behalf of COG-Ottawa?

- Food insecurity and health
- Physical access to food
- Food access in schools
- Food production in urban areas
- Food production in rural areas

Participants will provide feedback to COG-Ottawa on how we can best be involved in this project. For details on the Food For All project, visit [www.spcottawa.on.ca/ofsc/en/foodforall.asp](http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/ofsc/en/foodforall.asp). If you can participate on behalf of COG-Ottawa, contact Petra Stevenson, Program Co-ordinator, at 613-244-4000 or [ottawachapter@cog.ca](mailto:ottawachapter@cog.ca).

"Not only must we be good, but we must also be good for something."

Henry David Thoreau



## COG-Ottawa thanks all Volunteers 2009

### FARM AND GARDEN TOURS

Michael Ilgert  
Colin Lundy  
Lloyd Strachan

### WEB MASTERS

Neil Richards  
Debbie Holzman

### ORGANIC GARDEN AT THE EXPERIMENTAL FARM

Gillian Boyd  
Jim and Denise Davidson  
Rita Patterson

### ORGANIC GARDENING COURSES

David Townson  
Robert Battistella

Pat Lucey  
Margaret Townson  
George Bushell  
Musafiri Nova

### DISPLAY/BOOTH

Heidi Krol  
Connie Mooney  
Dierdre Furlong  
Peter Bradley  
Lloyd Strachan  
Dave & Diane Smith

Lucie Caunter  
Ray Pearmain  
Mat Paterson  
Lynda Harvey  
Janet Mrenica  
Jim Armstrong

Sally Mooney  
Robert Battistella  
Anke Craig  
Pauline Gagnon

Siegfried and Ingrid Neumann  
Lynda Hall  
Gerry Prescott  
Yolanda Saito  
Paloma Dawkins  
Taylor Faith  
Nicole Desjardins  
BreAnna  
Cody Laskar  
Mallarie

### GROWING UP ORGANIC OTTAWA

AJ Shewchuk  
Clint Shewchuk  
Joe Simpson  
Jud Simpson  
Petra Stevenson  
Robert Oechsli  
Derek Rhodenizer  
Jeff Iles

Holly Newsome  
Cheryl Tweedie  
Luc Nugent  
Mary Young  
Anne Marie Korba  
Nancy Campbell  
Michele McIntosh  
Sabrina Wood  
Ian Clark  
Joey Tavernier  
Kaitlin Evans  
James Monroe  
Leannah Fidler  
Jenn Camirand  
Kaycee Vantassel  
Kendall Bradburn  
Nick Pelletier  
Aaron Lemkow  
Daniel Nadeau  
Gillian Prouse  
Kyla Ramsay  
Ashley Simpson  
Gina Becker

### GROWING UP ORGANIC PRESCOTT-RUSSELL

Diane Bedford  
Nick Goursky  
Elliot Smith  
Joe Marcotte  
Donovan Bigus  
Jaxson Bigus  
Xiomara Campos  
Brendan Frauzel  
Phil Morin  
Ashli McCarthy  
Pat Hayes  
Helen Pharand  
Jamie Mod  
Joe Landriault  
Jane Landriault  
Phil Arbor  
Grant Hepburn  
Fred Torak  
Sybille Aalders  
Cheryl Bigus  
Dana Frauzel  
Michel Lachaume  
Chris Bates

### ECO FARM DAY

Bill Barkley, Trade-show Coordinator  
Arn Snyder, Speakers Coordinator  
Isabelle Masson, Registration Desk  
Alyssa Blais, Preregistration  
Christine Estermann, Food Coordinator  
Mike Ilgert, Raffle  
Connie Horbas, Silent Auction

### DOWN TO EARTH

Laura Stewart, Editor  
Allison Gibson, Co-Editor  
Robin McAndrew, Culinary Corner  
Anouk Iversen, Book Reviews  
Sally Luce, Book Reviews  
Ray Pearmain, Book Reviews  
Stephanie Pelot, Layout  
Robert Battistella, Advertisement Coordinator  
Valerie Maier, Mailing  
Matthew Patterson, Mailing  
Faith Phillips, Mailing  
Freya Van Every, Mailing  
Jo Van Every, Mailing  
Margaret Townson, Steering Committee Representative

### FEAST OF FIELDS 2009

Meredith  
Alison Clegg  
Beth  
John  
Lyne

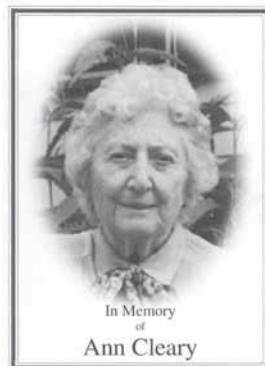
Stephanie  
Katerina  
Alexis  
Mardi  
Jonathan  
Todd  
Steven  
Melanie  
Robyn  
Anthony  
Dianne  
Helena  
Don  
Jeremy  
Daizy  
Jamie  
Nicole  
Gary  
Pierre Lemieux  
Vera Etches  
Jennifer Duschenes  
Scott MacKay  
Erin Eckler  
Aline Maurel  
Vick Ko  
Max Weinhold  
Alyssa Mayotte  
Ashley McGee  
Minh Ngo  
Dan Panaite  
Ian Clarke  
Laura Terry  
Oliver Schlossmacher  
Thomas Schlossmacher  
Max Schlossmacher  
Ingrid Weinhold  
Faye Campbell  
Pam Slavik  
Tess Fremont-Cote  
Daphne Wellman  
Michael Dilts  
Vincent Beutin  
Rob MacDonald  
Vincy Mathew  
Lara Chibuk  
Leela Ramachandran  
Lloyd Strachan  
Gerry Prescott  
Robert Oechsli

## Ann Cleary, Organic Garden Writer

Peter Iverson

Ann Cleary died peacefully October 22, 2009 at the age of 96 in Almonte, Ontario. Ann was a very active organic gardener and wrote numerous articles for Canadian Organic Growers and Peace and Environmental News magazines. She left England as a war bride to join her husband Charles first on a worn out farm near Watson's Corners in rural Lanark County. As a very cultured English woman, the adjustment to her new life and raising her family in Canada was not an easy one. She later worked as a librarian at the American Embassy in Ottawa in the 1960s, which was a considerable advantage to her. She was able to afford to travel to the United States and to visit her ailing mother in England.

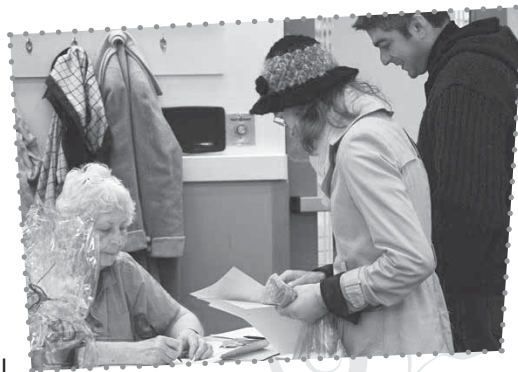
Through the then Miss Louise Elliott, the librarian in my home town of Carleton Place, Ontario, Ann became a lifelong friend of my late mother and father. I can fondly remember visits to their new mixed farm and organic garden in the hills, woodlands, and swamps of nearby Ramsay Township. Ill health forced Ann to curtail her much loved gardening passion in the early 1980s and after her husband died she lived in Country Haven, a retirement residence in Almonte. She is survived by her daughter Joanna of Halifax, Nova Scotia; her son Joslyn of Ottawa, Ontario; and relatives in Cornwall, England.



## COG-Ottawa Annual General Meeting and Fall Reflections

This year's COG-Ottawa Annual General Meeting was held Sunday, November 29th at the Sandy Hill Community Centre. The meeting was part of the Fall Reflections, which included a presentation by Michael Schmidt (see more details on Michael's presentation in the article on p. 4). Michael's trip to Ottawa was partly funded by the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) in conjunction with the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Planet in Focus ([www.planetinfocus.org](http://www.planetinfocus.org)) kindly donated a copy of the documentary that featured Michael's case, which was presented and well received by all who attended.

After some mingling and some delicious organic refreshments, it was time to get down to business. COG-Ottawa Chairperson Michael Ilgert kicked off the meeting with his report outlining the many happenings in the chapter over the past year. Some of the highlights included the new COG-Ottawa e-newsletter being developed by Robert Battistella and the Communications Subcommittee; the organic food directory, which is now an online tool; Eco Farm Day, which had its highest number of participants to date; the Organic Gardening workshops and the creation of a curriculum guide by Fleurette Huneault and George Bushell; the well-attended organic farm tours last summer; the demo garden at the experimental farm, coordinated by Gillian Boyd; and Feast of Fields, which boasted over 600 participants who gave



Margaret Tourond-Townson welcomes guests to Fall Reflections. Photo credit: David Townson.



Connie Mooney shows off what COG has to offer. Photo credit: David Townson.

rave reviews. Thanks to everyone for their hard work in making these events happen.

Michael also mentioned a few longtime COG-Ottawa volunteers who have opted to step down from their positions after years of great work. Connie Mooney and Lloyd Strachan have coordinated the COG Booth for the last ten years along with a team of faithful volunteers. Web master Neil Richards has also decided to take a well-earned break after keeping the COG-Ottawa web site running and up-to-date for six years. It's dedicated volunteers like these three that help keep the chapter running, and a big thank you was expressed to them all. We have just found a new volunteer to be our web master; however, if anyone is interested in volunteering with the COG Booth, please contact Petra Stevenson (613-244-4000).

Torry Reid, Growing Up Organic (GUO) project officer, spoke about the many successes of the program this year. Thanks to GUO's partnership with Bridgehead, they've been able to build, expand, and maintain nine school gardens. The popular summer farm camp program was also expanded to three weeks. Colin Lundy, Farmer Outreach Coordinator, gave an update on his program. The farmer courses held last winter were very well received. He's been working closely with some of Ottawa's key vegetable and beef producers and helping them think about making the transition to organic farming. The Vankleek Hill GUO satellite program has also been very busy with the establishment of the Village Green. They're planning a Wednesday night movie series through the winter.

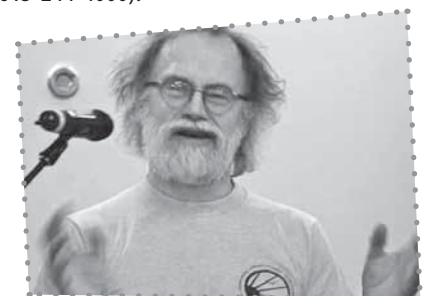


Chairperson Michael Ilgert reports on a busy year. Photo credit: David Townson.

Of course, the meeting wasn't complete without the bottom line. Treasurer Gary Weinhold reported that treasury responsibilities were expanded significantly this year, as COG-Ottawa took on fiscal tracking for the GUO project, started a payroll system, and began to accept both credit cards and Paypal for major events. For the next year, bookkeeping will need to be improved, as COG National's auditors will be reviewing the records as well. The year's balance sheet shows that although the reserve was reduced by about \$10,000, the books remain solidly positive with about \$10,000 in equity at year end.

Anyone with book-keeping or accounting skills who is able to help would be most appreciated. To receive a copy of the balance sheet, please contact Michael Ilgert (613-244-4000).

Before the meeting was adjourned, elections were held. The 2010 steering committee will include Chairperson Michael Ilgert and members Lloyd Strachan, Gary Weinhold, Dick Coote, David Townson, Sophie Beecher, Margaret Tourond-Townson, and Caroline McNicoll. Of course, it goes without saying that these folks are some of the hardest-working volunteers around. They deserve a huge round of applause for their efforts this year. If you're interested in becoming a member of the steering committee, contact Michael Ilgert (613-244-4000).



Gary Weinhold reports on COG-Ottawa's finances. Photo credit: David Townson.

Petra Stevenson thanks Michael Schmidt on behalf of COG-Ottawa.

Photo credit: David Townson.





"For five days in maximum security prison, Michael refused to eat and consequently was isolated then released by Corrections Canada, once again illustrating the power of sticking to your convictions."

## Fighting for Choice: Raw Milk in Canada

Laura Stewart

"Why are there four teats on a cow's udder?" Michael Schmidt asked a captivated audience at COG—Ottawa's Fall Reflections meeting. Rather than deliver a corny punch line, he went on to explain that since a cow usually only has one calf, the first is for the calf, the second is for the farm's dogs and cats, the third is for the farm's family, and the fourth is for all the families outside the farm. This simple question represents Michael's philosophy on milk and his belief that it is meant to be shared far beyond the confines of the farm. According to him, it's about food as medicine and an open-door farm policy, so everyone can see where their dairy products come from.

Upwards of 50 spectators (about half of whom were COG members) turned out on a beautiful Sunday afternoon to hear about raw milk sale from a man at the centre of the issue. Since 2006, when media began to follow his story, Michael has been gracing the media waves explaining his fight for Canadians to have the right to choose to consume raw milk. He is adamant that raw milk is not a food issue, but a food *rights* issue. According to him, the forces in the debate are largely political and have very little to do with the safety of the milk products themselves. Passionate and committed, Michael feels that the government is using his operation as an example to discourage others from following suit. His powerful belief that an individual is able to stand up to government and make a difference while remaining



Michael Schmidt delivers a captivating presentation.

Photo credit: David Townson.

respectful and true to themselves was the fundamental message of his talk and one that certainly resonated with the audience.

The afternoon included a showing of Norman Lofts' award-winning documentary *Michael Schmidt – Hero or Bioterrorist*, which was well received by the crowd. The 43-minute piece was first aired on CBC approximately a year ago. The film uses Michael's situation as a stepping stone to present a broader picture of the issue itself. Featured commentators include public

health officials, researchers, and farmers, all of whom present varied and conflicting opinions on the safety and regulation of raw milk and its products. Even though the experts claim that the scientific data don't show the benefits of raw milk to outweigh the risks, the anecdotes that Michael shared made it difficult not to think that its benefits are significant. He explained that many of his cow stakeholders came to him because they or their children were having health problems. He has heard of raw milk helping with many problems including allergies, autism, and digestion. To Michael, helping people is what it's all about.

In his opening remarks, Michael explained that after his farm was first raided by the government in 1994, he set out to find out how to best deal with such a situation, knowing that they could come back at any time. He and his family prepared for their return in two ways; they always had two cameras loaded with fresh tape and batteries, and they made sure that their farm and facilities were kept to the highest standard of cleanliness. When government officials and police finally arrived eleven and a half years later, Michael was the picture of collection. He, his family, and the farm workers complied with all requests and let the officials go about their investigation in accordance with their search warrant. All the while, his camera was rolling, capturing the images of 25 government officials as they went over his property with a fine-toothed comb. What they found wasn't a filthy operation as one might expect an unregulated facility to be, but rather an impeccable one; Michael had nothing to hide on his farm. This footage is what made the creation of the documentary possible and ironically has resulted in a marked increase in raw milk customers. Michael jokes that the Ontario government is his greatest source of publicity.

Since the raid in 2006, Michael has continued to do battle in court and has continued his raw milk business. His exploits have included one arrest for his participation in a demonstration against a dump being built over the Ellison Aquifer and a 28-day hunger strike that began while he was in jail. For five days in maximum security prison, Michael refused to eat and consequently was isolated then released by Corrections Canada, once again illustrating the power of sticking to your convictions. His hunger strike finally came to a dramatic close as he downed a cup of raw milk following a show of support by the Ontario Landowners' Association. The Association declared that Michael needed his strength to continue the fight, and they would fight with him.

In a further show of willingness to fight for the cause, when his lawyer asked for more money before his trial was to begin in 2008, Michael took on the defense himself. He had 9 months to prepare and went through a six-day trial in a courtroom packed full of supporters. To Michael, the trial was

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Michael Schmidt  
mingles with local  
farmers.

Photo credit: David  
Townson.



about more than proving that his cow-sharing program, which gives his customers a share of his cow rather than having them purchase milk or milk products directly from him, should be exempt from government sale regulations. It was about the fundamental right of Canadians to choose what they put in their bodies. He believes it's a personal choice on a sacred topic, and therefore should be accompanied by a passionate fight. Just last week, Michael announced at a press conference at Queen's Park that a group of lawyers has agreed to take on the case pro bono and will take it up to the Supreme Court if necessary. The Ontario provincial court's decision will be announced in January.

Since 2004, Michael's cow-share program has been undergoing a transition, from cow share to farm share or farm co-operative. This program allows people who live in the city to own part of a farm and part of the decision-making rights that go along with it. As a return on their investments, stakeholders can rest assured that they're consuming the highest quality products. Of course, they're welcome to pitch in on the farm if they like, and Michael often hosts social events such as a harvest celebration where stakeholders are invited to come and share in the cider pressing. Since not everyone has the \$1 million in startup capital or credit and the desire to get up early each morning and milk cows required to become a farmer, a new social framework for farming is required. And this framework should allow Canadians the freedom to choose what they consume. It's a win-win situation, as the farmers receive financial support and are able to support a much greater number of people. Michael's Glen-colton Farms has produced a document outlining their co-operative program, which is available for reference by contacting him at [arc@bmts.com](mailto:arc@bmts.com).

Michael received a standing ovation at Fall Reflections, a testament to the powerful nature of his presentation. Although I'm not a farmer, I was still taken with Michael's passion and perseverance in fighting for his fellow Canadians' rights to choose what they eat and drink. After hearing from such a strong believer in the power of the individual and our abilities to make a difference, I would be surprised if many of us didn't think twice the next time we pick up a carton of pasteurized milk.

For more details on this issue, see the Fall 2009 edition of *Down to Earth*.

## Growing Up Organic Update

Torry Reid

### THANK YOU BRIDGEHEAD

For the past 5 months, Growing Up Organic (GUO) has had the good fortune of partnering with Bridgehead in raising funds for the GUO schoolyard gardens. This partnership has led to a total of \$10,050 being raised for building and maintaining the gardens through sales of the GUO blend and over 50 volunteer hours from Bridgehead staff. With the money raised, GUO has built and expanded nine schoolyard gardens and hired a summer garden maintenance coordinator and an artist in residence for our Youth Farm Apprenticeship Camp. GUO would like to take this opportunity to thank Bridgehead for their amazing support. Through their help we have been able to build a strong community of schoolyard gardens where kids and adults alike can enjoy the fruits of their labour while learning about organic gardening.

### REACHING NEW MARKETS

Since June 2009, through funding from the Ontario Market Investment Fund, GUO has been working directly with five local farmers helping them tap into new markets, mainly retail and daycare kitchens. In total, GUO has facilitated sales to four retail stores, including Natural Food Pantry, Nicastro in the Glebe, Sandy Hill Food Co-op, and Nature's Buzz. These stores have bought produce from a number of local farmers through GUO and are looking to buy meats throughout the winter.

Retailers have responded positively to the program because of increased consumer demand for local organic foods. From food miles to supporting local farmers, consumers are beginning to be aware of the impacts their food choices have on the environment, the economy, and their communities. For this reason, they are asking that retailers make positive food options available. GUO makes these choices accessible and convenient to retailers by representing many farmers, and thereby offering a wide variety of products in large quantities.

In turn, farmers have also benefited from this program. GUO has facilitated over \$2,500 in sales this year. Retailers demand large quantities, making delivery days quick and profitable for farmers. In addition to this, farmers no longer have to worry about marketing their products and finding new buyers. With a weekly product list from farmers, the GUO distribution coordinator is able to find appropriate markets, contact buyers, and take orders on behalf of the farmer. This allows farmers to focus their energy towards growing foods, rather than marketing.

Even with all the positive feedback, GUO still hopes to work on improving the retailer-farmer relationship. GUO hopes to increase sales next year by determining which products are needed, how much is needed, and negotiate appropriate prices. With this knowledge, farmers will be able to plan next year's growing season accordingly knowing there is a market for what they are growing. In addition to this, during the winter GUO will be looking to recruit greater farmer participation.

If this project is of interest to you or you would like more information, please contact Torry Reid at [torry@cog.ca](mailto:torry@cog.ca) or 613-627-6343.



## Bringing Green to the Ghetto: A Word with Novella Carpenter

Laura Stewart

*Novella is the author of Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer (Penguin Press 2009).*

A self-proclaimed “child of back-to-the-land hippies,” Novella Carpenter is an inspiring mix of academic, advocate, and hands-on farmer. It’s been over ten years since she began to cultivate her downtown California home, starting with a few chickens and some bees. Today, to the amazement of her neighbours, Novella’s operating a full-scale urban farm. Her chickens cluck and rabbits hop among everyday urban occurrences, such as theft and violence, and she’s able to share what she produces with those who are going hungry. By bringing a little piece of green to the “ghetto,” Novella is able to balance an office day job with nights out on the town and early mornings milking goats, while gaining and spreading a new respect for the food system and the circle of life. Perhaps this is the best of both worlds?

Novella’s background in journalism has enabled her to share her story with her country and the world through her book and her blog. She was kind enough to answer a few questions for the readers of *Down to Earth (DtE)* typed out on a Blackberry during a recent late night train ride.

*DtE: I noticed you studied under Michael Pollan. What’s the most important/significant/memorable lesson you took from this experience, and how has it shaped your career?*

Novella: Michael is a gifted teacher as well as writer. He teaches at the University of California at Berkeley School of Journalism, which I attended from 2005 to 2007. As a teacher of a popular class called “Following the food chain,” he urged us to follow our obsessions and follow the story of our food. At the time I had been raising meat animals and trying to write about it. He urged me to make it less personal and to learn more about the history of what I was doing, to read books that were actually against eating meat, so that I would have lots of different frames of reference.

On a practical note, he told me to go to New York for a few days after graduating, in order to meet with editors; on that trip, I sold my book to Penguin.

*DtE: From your blog, it looks like you’ve had a busy fall touring for Farm City. What’s the*

### An Excerpt from *Farm City*

*Out of the corner of my eye, I watched through the window as the postal jeep turned down our street and pulled to a stop in front of our house. A man dressed in wool shorts hopped out, holding an air-hole-riddled box in his arms. [...]*

*The postal worker made me sign an official-looking piece of paper before he would hand me the box. It peeped when I opened it.*

*[...] The delivery guy shook his head in disbelief. I could tell he had questions. Were we not in the city? Wasn’t downtown Oakland only ten blocks away? Who is this insane woman? Is this even legal? But years of working for the government had, perhaps, deadened his curiosity. He didn’t look me in the eye. He didn’t make a sound. He just jumped back into his postal jeep and drove away.*

*Mr. Nguyen giggled. For the last few years he had happily observed—and participated in—my rural-urban experiments. He knew poultry when he saw it: he had been a farmer in Vietnam before enlisting to help the Americans during the war. “Oh, yes, baby chicks,” he said. “Ducks.” He pointed a cigarette-stained finger at each species. “Goose.” His finger paused at the pimpled heads. He looked at me for a hint.*

*most unique memory you’ll take away from the tour? How do you feel the book has been received? What’s been most surprising about meeting your readers?*

Novella: The most unique memory I have of touring is how, in every city to which I travel, I almost always meet the local urban farmer. In L.A., I found myself on bicycle before my reading at the public library there, riding through neighborhoods, checking out these crazy squash plants in people’s front lawns. I’ve met so many great people who are working hard to grow food in cities.

*Farm City* has been embraced by such a wide spectrum of people: chefs, rural and urban farmers, permaculturists, ex-hippies, and young people getting involved in the food movement. I was most surprised at the rural farmers who read and liked my book. But I guess it makes sense; no matter what scale you are raising food on, you have the same struggles and victories.

*DtE: I’m sure many of our readers will want to read your book and learn more, but can you tell us a little bit about your urban farm? Are you still keeping it up? Who’s looking after it while you’re touring?*

Novella: I have a blog about Ghost Town Farm, which I update regularly. Things change all the time, but currently I have three Nigerian dwarf goats, two breeding pairs of rabbits, four chickens, and a beehive. The vegetables and fruits are thriving. Thank the gods for my partner, Bill, who is dutifully taking care of everything while I’m gone. But I made it a point to go on quick jaunts, not long travels for weeks at a time. I do miss the goats terribly, though, no matter how short a time gone. There’s something so grounding and connected about milking the goats every morning, and I miss that.

*DtE: What has been your greatest success as an urban farmer and why? Have you had any disasters?*

Novella: My greatest success urban farming was an accident: the longer I cultivated the soil and raised animals 10 blocks from downtown Oakland, the more hungry people came to the garden to pick food. Originally I was just growing it for myself, and I would be annoyed. But how annoyed can one be when people in my impoverished ‘hood are hungry? Not that I’m a saint feeding the poor, but just that I realized that to be a real farmer, you have to grow for other people.

There have been disasters — that’s what my whole book is about, the education of an urban farmer — but it’s too complicated to go into here. People will have to read the book.

*DtE: I noticed you make reference to your neighbours thinking that you’re crazy for farming. Do you still get this reception, having published Farm City? If there’s one message you could get out there to your nay-sayers, what would it be?*

Novella: My neighbors mostly don’t know about my book. Most of them don’t speak English. I did give copies to some of the people in my neighborhood who were in the book: Lana, Bobby, and Moses. They still think I’m crazy, but in a lovable way.

*DtE: What advice would you give to those who are just starting their own urban farms and gardens?*

Novella: My advice is always the same: start small and grow stuff you like. Some people bite off too much and then complain about how hard it is to farm. Or some people will plant kale even though they hate it because they think there will be a miracle and they’ll suddenly like kale if they grew it. Usually doesn’t happen. Even the pickiest eater likes something, like carrots, lettuce, or peas.

*To hear more about Novella’s travels and experiences as a farmer, visit her blog: <http://novellacarpenter.com/>. To learn more about her farm, pick up a copy of her book!*

"For us, the animal welfare piece is important. We consider that kind of thing before health or taste. But we also enjoy good food."

## Why I Raise Pigs

Jo VanEvery

In May 2009, my little family moved out of the city to a 24-acre farmlet in Lanark County. The move was the result of long discussions about sustainable living and a desire to have a bigger vegetable garden and maybe some chickens for eggs.

In June we bought two piglets. They are a heritage breed — large black pigs. And I have discovered that keeping pigs is one of the best conversation starters out there, with both city and country folks.

So why do we have pigs?

To be honest, my initial motivation was the work they could do for us. Pigs dig. They eat roots and bugs and other stuff that is in the soil. We want to expand our vegetable garden considerably. Pigs would be able to help dig the new vegetable garden.

We didn't put them in the vegetable garden field right away because pigs also love vegetables. That field is mostly long grass and a big sandy patch where an above-ground swimming pool stood. There is also a shady area in one corner and an overgrown rock garden in another. We moved the herbs to one of the flower beds closer to the house. We built them a shelter, and then, once we had harvested the tomatoes, they moved in to start digging it up.

But in addition to the labour, we also always planned to eat them. I sometimes joke that pigs are much tastier than roto-tillers. Neither of us had grown up on a farm or even in the country. And we knew it would be hard to kill animals that we know. But we also believe that if you eat meat, animals died to be your dinner. And that killing should be hard.

We do not have a problem with the idea of killing animals for our food. We do have a problem with confining large numbers of animals in barns for their whole lives, feeding foraging animals on grain out of a bucket, and doing all the things you need to do to keep those animals reasonably healthy in those conditions (routine antibiotics, etc.). I guess that's why we are COG members.

Hog farming has become very industrialized in North America. We think this is wrong. So, in addition to the labour the pigs put in around the place, we raise pigs because the animal welfare gain over pork bought from the store is huge.

For us, the animal welfare piece is important. We consider that kind of thing before health or taste. But we also enjoy good food. We actually like the taste of meat. Most commercial meat these days is bred to be lean and not to have a strong flavour.

The taste of meat is affected by what the animals eat. Most commercial hogs are fed on mixed grain with high protein content (so they grow fast). My pigs eat all kinds of stuff, including kitchen scraps and apples, as well as commercial hog grower mash.

There are other reasons we are critical of large commercial pork production. Consumer tastes in meat tend towards the better cuts. We believe that if you are going to kill animals to eat them, you should make good use of the whole animal. Killing an animal and then only using a fraction of the meat seems unethical as well as wasteful.



Luckily my parents really like things like pork hocks and pigtails. And I bet if I tried them now, I might, too. I've even made sauerkraut to go with them. We also plan to make sausages, which is a standard way of using up odd bits of meat. I don't object to ears, but I want more control over the other stuff that goes in them.

Although we fully expect the food to taste better and be healthier, our main motivation for raising pigs, just as with the other food-producing activities we do, is political/ethical.

We are generally opposed to the increasing control big business has over our food supply. We are opposed to the transportation costs that engenders. We are opposed to the consequences for animal welfare. We believe that concentrated control of the food supply is risky for everyone in terms of food security.

Right now we are mostly focused on our own food needs. We recognize that this is not sufficient. That with this land we could be supplying food for more than three people. But supplying our own food needs is where we are starting.

Neither of us comes from a farming background. We are good book-learners though, and we aren't afraid to ask for help. Starting small seems to be working. We haven't got overwhelmed yet.

And we are having fun. Pigs are really friendly animals, even when you don't have a bucket in your hand. And they love having their bellies scratched. That said, when a 150-pound pig decides he wants to do something, it is not easy to persuade him otherwise. It'll be hard to kill them. But that just reminds us to respect where our food comes from.

*Jo VanEvery and Matthew Paterson have been gradually increasing the amount of food they produce for several years. When they outgrew their large city garden, they moved to Lanark County and added chickens and pigs to their repertoire. They plan to get sheep in 2010 and maybe geese — Jo has heard a rumour that they weed. Jo occasionally blogs about their life at <http://jove.homeschooljournal.net>.*



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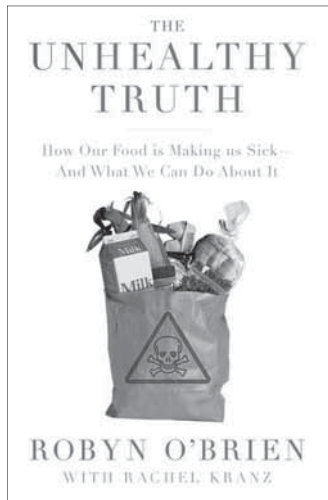


## I Just Finished Reading...

***The Unhealthy Truth – How Our Food Is Making Us Sick – And What We Can Do About It*, Robyn O'Brien with Rachel Kranz, Broadway Books, 2009**

Reviewed by Ray Pearmain

I was schooled as a youth in England and cannot recall any fellow students who had allergies and could not eat school dinners (i.e., lunches) unless the actual food revolted them (only once a week usually!). Yet today, children's allergies are rampant, and often peanuts for instance are banned from school sandwiches and snacks. Many kids have to take Ritalin for ADHD to calm them.



So here is a Texan housewife finding that her four kids are acting up and allergies are diagnosed. Being an MBA and investment research analyst, she wants to know why and starts searching the web and calling people. Guess what she finds — allergies seem to be related to processed food and the established, not-for-profit allergy website does not disclose that some of its directors are taking research monies from those wonderful folks who gave us GM grains — Monsanto, etc. She then

establishes her own website and tries to change her own kids' eating habits. Most COG members will not find any new facts on allergies and GM and processed foods in this book, which is the result of Mrs. O'Brien pursuing her fact finding and eventually being interviewed on US television ([www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30586160/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30586160/)). However, she does, with the help of a ghost writer, produce a very readable and practical book for parents and everyone who wants to move away from the unhealthiest of processed foods and see big, barely regulated US corporations corrupt academics. The book has lots of annexes with lists of foods to avoid and ones to choose as well as web resources, copious notes, and the benefits of eating organic foods.

Interestingly, she stresses organic milk, which in the US is free from synthetically created growth hormones such as recombinant bovine growth hormone (RBGH), which she states is not in Canadian conventional milk (thanks to Dr. Chopra and others). However, as I write this, I realize that I am chewing sugar-free gum, which contains aspartame, a chemical that Donald Rumsfeld of Iraq War infamy and then President of the Searle company, used his government influence to get approved by the FDA, which is itself a revolving door for ex-food industry executives.

Perhaps a similar "popular" book on GM, the Canadian food industry, and academics needs to be forthcoming!

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