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# Darren Bardati: From farm to classroom to table

There's a familiar old saying: throughout your life, you may need a doctor a few times and you may need a lawyer a few times, but you will need a farmer three times a day.



MATTHEW MCCULLY

**Bishop's professor Darren Bardati out in front of his garden, at his home just east of Lennoxville. He is a driving force behind the Lennoxville Farmers' Market, which opens for the season on Saturday.**

Bishop's University environmental studies professor Darren Bardati knows the important role farmers play in the local food system.

Starting the Lennoxville Farmers' Market was the first step in connecting locals with farmers from the area. He is now working on a study of farmers' markets in the Townships, looking at their adaptive capacity in the face of climate change and other stresses of the agricultural industry.

Oh, and he doesn't just talk the talk. He also walks the walk. He and his wife and family homestead on a four-hectare (10-acre) property, raising goats and chickens, and tending a garden that grows bigger every year.

"I'm just the wheelbarrow pusher, my wife is the brains," he joked, describing the venture as a family affair.

"My dad was kind of a back-to-the-lander," Bardati said, describing his upbringing in the Lennoxville area.

"Had I had a different attitude back then I would have learned more," he said, admitting his real education in growing food came when he and wife Jennifer moved onto their property just east of Lennoxville, near Bulwer, five years ago.

"Before the truck was unpacked, I was putting in the first garden," he said, anxious to put theory to practice.

"All the skills are coming back," he said, referring to what he had picked up in the periphery on his parents' farm when he was younger.

Bardati studied at Bishop's, and completed his master's and PhD from McGill in 2002. Teaching environmental studies and natural resource management, his interest while studying was in forestry and watershed management. The focus on food is relatively new, he said.

Living off the land out in the country is not as easy as romantic as it seems, Bardati said.

"It's a lot of work. You have to have the heart and the conviction to do it, but it's good work," he said.

Bardati described his homestead as "beyond organic," responding to current debates about the healthiest food available.

"I don't want to sound prideful, but we're more into the full-circle, cradle-to-grave approach to farming," he said, more interested in sustainability than following the regime of a specific certifying body. Bardati added that transparency in growing practices is of the utmost importance.

"It's not so much about self-reliance, but more about building resilience and community self-reliance," he said, describing his motivation to get involved with food production.

"Why should we buy apples from China when we can grow them here?" he asked.

Bardati was instrumental in starting up the Lennoxville Farmers' Market, which is about to start up its fourth season this coming Saturday, June 6.

"We started it as a community space," he said, wanting to connect consumers with local farmers and teach them about local food.

"They are not just vendors," Bardati said, "they are members of an association," he explained, with a focus on producing and selling high quality local products.

Currently with 15 members, the Lennoxville Farmers' Market Association is growing slowly, and smartly.

"We could have 50 members if we wanted," he said, but the association sets the bar high for the quality of the food and products to be sold at the market.

The LFMA will bring their market to Cookshire Fair on Sunday, Aug. 23, not only to sell products, but to provide an educational element. Bardati said information will be on hand demonstrating the environmental impacts of local versus non-local consumption.

Bardati was recognized for his role in making the market a success by the Borough of Lennoxville at the annual outstanding achievement awards, held last February.

After five years of practical experience on his own small farm, and interacting with other food producers at the market, Bardati is now taking his interest in local food to the next level.

He was recently approved for a grant from Bishop's and will begin working on a research project this summer called "Adaptive Capacity in Local Food Systems: Analysis of the Farmers' Markets in the Eastern Townships."

Bardati explained that people are more and more concerned with where their food comes from, citing the explosive growth of farmers' markets over the past 15 years. He intends to look at the components of the local food system, what is being grown and where is it being sold, and what role local farmers' markets play in relation to food production in the area.

He will also study how farmers are adapting to climate change and economic stresses.

"Are they becoming more resilient?" he asks, "Or are they packing up and closing shop?" The study will take two years, Bardati said.

The bigger picture, according to Bardati, is connecting people to their food. "If you ask kids today, where does food come from? They respond, 'the store.'"

"My grandparents knew how to garden," he said, "sometime in the 1950's people walked away from the land."

Recognizing not every household can raise goats and chickens, Bardati said people do have the capacity to participate in food production.

He used the example of Victory Gardens. During the First and Second World Wars, due to food shortages, there was a governmental campaign encouraging people to dig up their yards and lawns and plant gardens to lessen the burden on the public food supply.

"It was done then, I think we could do it now," Bardati said.

The first Lennoxville Farmers' Market of the season will take place from 10 a.m. till noon this Saturday, June 6, at the former co-op building at 2882 College Street in Lennoxville, across from Clark and Sons.

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