

EAT LOCAL

Sharing organic harvests



KATRINA SIMMONS

“A lot of things need to change in how we distribute food,” says Richard Tunstall, an organic farmer on the outskirts of Brantford.

He and his wife, Ella Haley, are doing their part to help build a more sustainable local food system in Brant County. Last year, they developed an organic market garden on Hearts Content Organic Farmstead, and now sell vegetables at the Brantford Farmers Market.

Market gardens are common enough in Brant county. Organic ones like this are less so. But what makes Hearts Content unique is the team of horses that Tunstall uses for field work in lieu of a tractor.

These eco-friendly beauties are part of Tunstall’s commitment to the environment, to reduce the farm’s consumption of fossil fuels.

“I’d much rather sit behind a horse than behind a tractor” he says.

Lamenting infrastructures that are designed for trucks, he continues, “if I didn’t have to travel on Highway 2, I’ love to take my horses to the market.” They are part of the rhythm of the farm, eating the hay that grows here, contributing manure that will be composted and returned to the fields for fertilizer.

“And they make other horses,” he says, pointing out that it takes a lot of non-re-

newable energy to make and maintain a tractor. Two years ago, Haley and Tunstall moved from Alberta to these 23 hectares – part of her ancestral farm.

She grew up on this land, knows every battle fought to preserve it. Their acreage borders Hwy. 403 on the south – prime real estate for development along the major transportation corridor.

“Just over there,” says Haley, pointing a few hundred metres across the road to a white picket fence, “that’ the Green-belt.” Since it was established in 2005 to preserve a great swath of green space and farmland across southern Ontario, the farms in Brant county – just outside its boundaries – have been coveted by developers. To ensure their little corner of Brant county remains an organic farm, Haley and Tunstall are establishing a conservation easement on the title of their land through Ontario Farmland Trust. They hope this will inspire other

farmers around them to do the same.

Quick to establish networks when they moved here, they know they are not alone in their concerns. The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) has been particularly helpful, and is also concerned about farmland preservation. The new Brant-Hamilton-Halton chapter of the National Farmers Union (NFU) sprang up around this same issue, as have citizen action groups such as Sustainable Brant.

Kevin Hamilton joined them on the farm this year, after several years with Plan B Organic Farm in Flamborough. He has helped Tunstall and Haley develop a community supported agriculture (CSA) program, where supporters pay at the beginning of the season for a share of the weekly harvest.

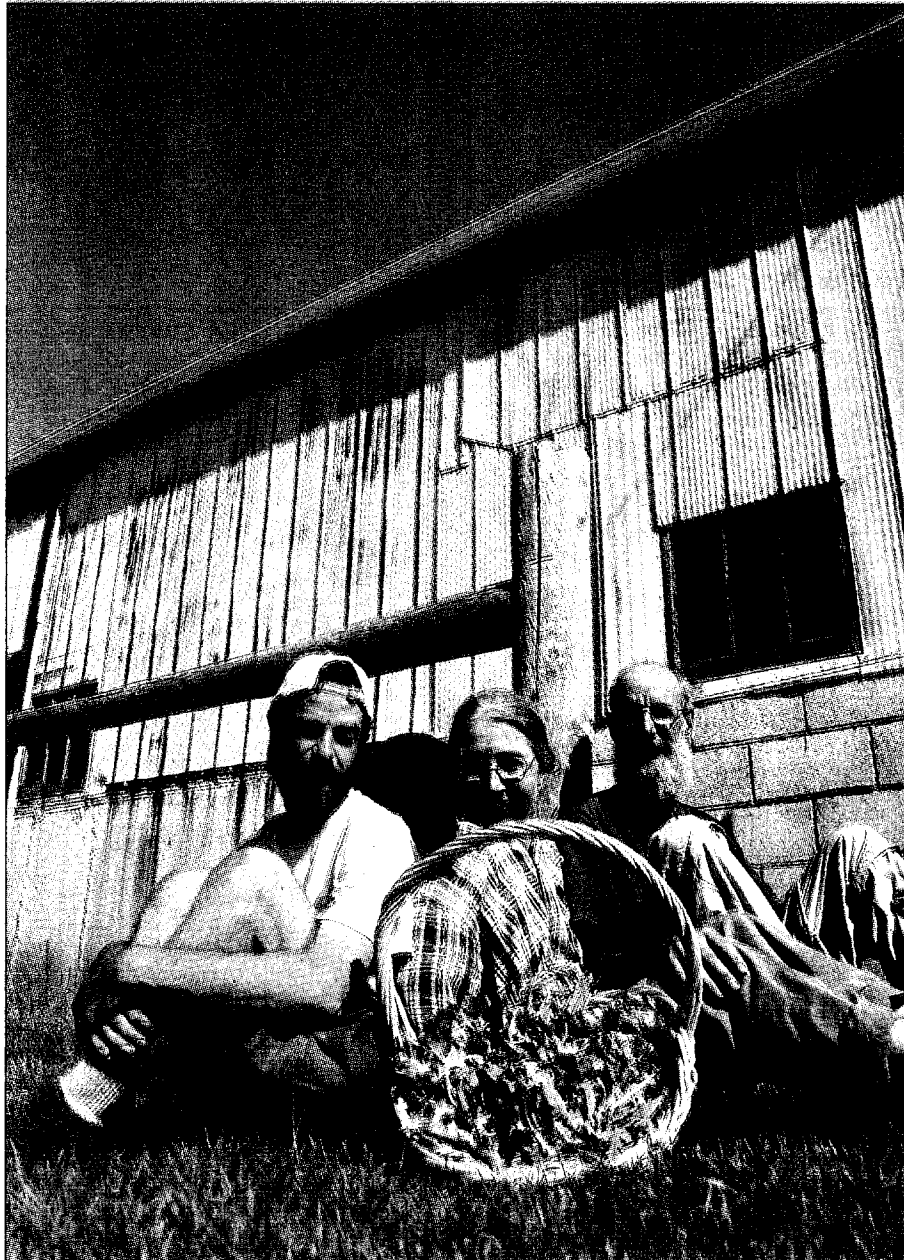


Transferring just-picked spinach from an outdoor washing station to a 20-litre salad spinner, he rhymes off some of the 30 or so types of vegetables he has planted in a one hectare field a short walk from the house. He knows the CSA model well, and sees much potential for Hearts Content.

“Market gardening creates lots of opportunity to employ local people. Small farms spur the rural economy, create community, and provide opportunities where jobs are few and far between.”

Shares in this summer’ harvest are still available, and vegetables can be picked up at depots in Ancaster and Brantford. To learn more about Hearts Content Organic Farmstead and CSA, call 519-647-0307.

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JESSICA DARMANIN, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Kevin Hamilton, Buck the dog, Ella Haley and Richard Tunstall at the organic farm.