

# Feeding 5,000 students with an eye on local product

The University of Guelph's 100 Mile Grille serves food that truly lives up to its billing

BY HELEN LAMMERS-HELPS  
Ontario Farmer

The Hospitality Services Department at the University of Guelph has made tremendous strides when it comes to serving local food.

And when you're feeding 5,000 students every day, that's no small feat.

Executive Chef Gordon Cooledge, and Hospitality Services Purchasing Coordinator, Mark Kenny, are two of the drivers behind local food initiatives at the University of Guelph.

They established the 100 Mile Grille, a restaurant in Creelman Hall which serves only food grown within a 100 mile radius of Guelph. The restaurant is open from Sep-

tember to April to students on meal plans as well as faculty, staff and the general public.

Kenny speaks with pride as he lists the local foods served at the 100 Mile Grille. Burgers are made with beef from the University's Elora Beef Research Station. Veggie burgers are made with beans from Rounds Beans near Lakeside.

And a complete line of condiments to go on the burgers is made in-house from local ingredients. Niagara Peach Salsa, Wellington Beer BBQ sauce, charred corn salsa, zucchini relish, and spicy tomato ketchup are just some of the mouth-watering preserves you'll find in the 100 Mile Grille.

Other local foods served in the 100 Mile Grille include cheese from Bright's Cheese, turkey burgers from Hayter's Farms, goat cheese from Woolwich Dairy, buns from

Grainharvest Breadhouse and fries made fresh from Downey Farms' potatoes.

In addition to beef from the Elora Research Station, Hospitality Services gets Arctic char, maple syrup, honey, and some vegetables from the university's research programs.

Kenny who works closely with the chefs on campus, regularly sources produce through the Elmira Produce Auction as well as Don's Produce, a Cambridge Distributor.

And while Kenny is a strong proponent of buying local, he says in the end it's all about the taste. "Local food is fresher, tastes better and lasts longer," he says.

However, working with such big volumes, price is also a very important consideration. Kenny looks for opportunities to save money without sacrificing quality.



U of G Hospitality Services Purchasing Coordinator, Mark Kenny, sources local foods to feed 5,000 students per day

For example, he is working with a cucumber grower to take #2 cucumbers in September and October for the salad bar. "They're going to be chopped up anyway," he explains.

He doesn't buy organic except for the Organic Trade Show in January because it's too expensive.

Kenny's biggest demand for produce is when classes are in session from September to April. The menu changes every three weeks since they

are feeding the same students for eight months.

Cooledge and Kenny are also looking at ways to serve local produce beyond the summer and fall months when produce is in season. "That's the low-hanging fruit," says Kenny.

They successfully applied for a grant from the Greenbelt Foundation to establish the Creelman Produce Processing Facility. Here they prepare produce for freezing so it can be served after the harvest season.

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## 🌱 Potatoes

# Australian DNA soil test wins award

For example, this spring they washed, chopped and froze a thousand pounds of asparagus from a local farm.

They also aim to reduce waste as much as possible. For example, the bottoms of the asparagus stalks will be used to make soup.

Apprenticing students from George Brown College spend their summers working for U of G's Hospitality Services which does all the catering for conferences on campus. Canning and freezing produce gives the apprenticing students skills they wouldn't often get exposure to, says Kenny.

The University of Guelph is fortunate to have both the labour and the space to make foods from scratch, he adds. "Some institutions may not have room for a prep kitchen."

Kenny is a long time committee member of Taste Real, the branding initiative of Guelph Wellington Local Food developed to support local businesses and farmers. Kenny, a self-admitted foodie, enjoys meeting the people in the business. He regularly eats out, attends trade shows, visits farms on his time off and is active on twitter and Facebook.

Sourcing local food can take extra time and research. "You have to know who's who in the zoo," says Kenny. "You need to know where you can get product."

For example, serving a local pickle to go with the burgers in the 100 Mile Grille proved more challenging than anticipated. Kenny used his connections to try to find an Ontario pickle.

He finally located one pickle maker in Harrow - Lakeside Packers - which could guarantee their pickles were made with only Ontario cucumbers. However, the only way he could get them was to order a whole skid load, 20 pails of sliced and 20 pails of whole pickles - a year's supply, and then store them in the basement of Creelman Hall.

Lack of storage is one obstacle to not serving more local food often cited by institutions. Kenny admits this is one advantage of the cavernous basements found in the old buildings on campus.

Most foods are made from scratch at the University of Guelph but when they do buy ready-made foods they look for local processors, says Kenny. "Local processors create local jobs and economic benefit, one of the pillars of sustainability."

PreDicta Pt test for six soil-borne pathogens including scab and root knot nematode

BY MELANIE EPP  
Ontario Farmer

A new DNA diagnostic soil test developed by researchers at the South Australia Research and Development Institute (SARDI) recently received the John Deere Productivity Partner Award.

The system, PreDicta Pt, tests for six soil-borne pathogens that threaten potato crops. Launched commercially last August, the new tool has received industry-wide recognition from producers, processors and agronomists.

Like here, potato growers in Australia suffer yield reduction due to loss or damage from disease. Annual losses amount to approximately \$80-million. Currently the PreDicta Pt testing service provides an indication of the risk for powdery scab, black dot, and root knot nematode.

While it is currently not available in Canada, the technology spells huge potential for growers worldwide.

"One of the reasons they aren't available is that the DNA test thresholds need to be validated in any new region," says Dr. Kathy Ophel Keller, research chief. A particular DNA level of powdery scab fungus, she says, may be quite different here in Canada due to growing conditions, soil types and potato varieties grown.

Dr. Ophel Keller and her colleague, Dr. Alan McKay, have been developing the testing regime since 1996 when Keller joined the team at SARDI. At that time, the methods they used were slow and labour intensive.

"We were extracting DNA from soil and using fairly crude hybridization techniques to measure the pathogens and we quickly realized we need to change the technology pretty radically," says Keller.

The equipment they've since developed can handle 500-gram soil samples—a drastic improvement from the 10-gram samples it used to handle. This allows them to deal with more variability in the soil. Perhaps more importantly, though, the equipment also allows them to produce clean DNA.

Currently, PreDicta Pt is offered commercially to farmers through agronomists who are trained to properly analyze the results. Once analyzed, agronomists offer management techniques and help growers to make follow-up decisions.

"Growers are welcome to undertake the training and to access the service directly if they wish to do so," says Dr. Ophel Keller.



Researchers Kathy Ophel Keller and Alan McKay have been working on the testing regimen since 1996

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