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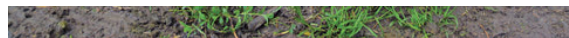
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Lamblicious promotes lamb and community

A young family finds joy in their work, family and community as they connect through their store and farm.

By Lisa B. Pot

When it came time to naming the new business, Jessica Hastings knew she wanted it to contain the words “lamb” and “delicious”.

She’s telling me this as we sit on the tailgate of my truck, feet dangling over wet grass, while her four-year-old asks for the third time if he can go home yet and her husband, Adam Lesperance, rocks baby Arkelle in his arms.

There’s a pause and I look up from my notetaking. She’s looking at Adam. “So I put them together. I came up with the name,” he says, a mocking grin on his face. “Yeah, but I came up with the two words,” retorts Jessica, as the two begin to laugh. “We always argue about this,” she says.

The tag on the business name, ‘Local Lamb Your Way’ is all hers. On this they agree.

It’s hard not to be charmed by this young family which is hoping to establish their business as a source of fresh, local lamb from their own and neighbouring flocks as well as a purveyor of organic and community grown products from the South

Bruce Peninsula at their home/store on Bruce Line 10.

The pair grew up in Bruce County and met in school where Adam earned a degree in Ecosystem Management while Jessica graduated with her BA in Environmental Studies and Geography.

During that time, Adam was dutifully taking care of a small but growing herd of six sheep that he was given as a birthday gift.

"I asked for sheep when I turned 16," remembers Adam. Jessica laughs. "Sixteen! And you didn't think to ask for a car or something," she teases.

"I was a geek," admits Adam.

While in school, Adam purchased an old general store with a friend. The price was right and they figured it would make an ideal residence for himself and friends. As everyone got married and moved out, Adam and Jessica also married and bought the friend out.

When Jessica decided to look for work, Adam suggested they open their home as a store once again. But what to sell? Lamb was the obvious answer.

Jessica took advantage of courses and funds available through the Ontario Self-Employed Benefit Program (OSEB) to develop a business plan, renovate the front room on the home/store and launch Lamblicious.

They opened in May 2012 and sold out in three days.

"We underestimated the demand," admits Jessica. "We started off great but realized we needed to learn more about consistency and timing."

Now, they are partnered with three abattoirs to keep the freezers full of the cuts that customers want.

This has been a learning curve as well.

“Lamb chops and rack of lamb are the biggest sellers on the retail side of our business,” explains Jessica. “Wholesale, it’s the lamb burgers for restaurants.” Adam’s family are foodies and have many old family recipes the couple was keen to try so they could offer value-added products to their store. They experimented with: garlic sausage rolls, Lebanese-spice sausages, rosemary meatballs, kebobs, meat pies and other appetizers.

Creating new products is time-consuming and understanding market demands equally so. Consequently, they cut down their line of appetizers from seven to two, keeping the best sellers which are meat balls and sausage rolls.

At the same time, they became fascinated with the 100 mile diet concept alongside their long-term beliefs that raising animals in a free-range and sustainable environment is worth promoting.

Subsequently, Jessica added other organic and/or environmentally sustainable products to the store’s merchandise.

Pheasant Hill Farms is just down the road and Jessica makes shelf space for pheasant eggs and pork products. Pheasant Hill raises free-range Berkshire pigs, all GMO free.

Persephone Market Gardens grow and bag organic salads and are also neighbours.

Adam’s parents, Bob and Donna, tap and bottle their own maple syrup under the Sauble River Farms label and their product line is offered as well.

The Southampton Olive Oil Company bottles oils and vinegars imported from over

the world and their products are an excellent complement to the salads, pork and lamb offered at the store.

“Being able to support the community is so important to us,” says Jessica. “It’s not just a fad. This is the way the world will be.”

Adam agrees. He suggests when fuel prices begin to climb there will be a return to locally grown and supplied foods and materials so why not be prepared now? Also, there’s a passion for farm and family life that supports their idealism as they work at fulfilling the dream that Lamblicious will one day be their primary source of income.

They have a 40-acre farm. It’s rocky and hilly but ideal for sheep-grazing. The herd has grown to 80 ewes and each year, Adam keeps a selection of kids to grow the flock.

“I trust my genetics,” which he describes as “quite a mixture”, heavy on Dorset and North Country Cheviot. He also mixes in Katahdin and recently purchased a Isle de France X Dorset ram to add more meaty qualities to the next generation.

Their target this year is to butcher and sell 266 sheep (their own and some sourced from a family member). Also, they continue to meet with a life coach and business coaches to come up with new value-added products and new ways to market their brand.

It’s not a struggle.

“I love what I do,” says Jessica, who now has the baby, wrapped warmly in a lambskin blanket. “I’m pro-healthy food and I really enjoy the people I meet at the store.”

Adam says it's a busy life but knowing they are working towards something wholesome and meaningful is very satisfying to them both.

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