

The Herald Second Front

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The full-size paper reaching more than 12,600 homes in Halton Hills

Pick-your-own stretches dollars, gives an outing

Story and Photos
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Every weekend a horde of city dwellers armed with pails, bushel baskets or bags descend on local farms to pick their own fruits and vegetables, often combining a family outing with stretching food dollars and getting the pick of the choicest produce.

The Herald recently visited four dissimilar pick-your-own farms in and around Halton Hills and all the farmers interviewed were satisfied that the pick-your-own trend is beginning to mushroom.

For the Moffat family on Fifth Line just north of Steeles Avenue, getting into the pick-your-own business came about as a process of elimination.

The Moffats moved to their 20-acre farm from Toronto in 1972. Dave Moffat told The Herald. He believed that cereal grain crops would only return about \$50 per acre, hardly enough to starve. Boarding horses would require a lot of expensive fencing and renting plots of land just wouldn't get enough takers.

"But people like to come and pick and have the dirty work already done," he said. So in 1974 they gave pick-your-own a trial on a small plot of land. The response was good, the Moffats got more farm equipment and in 1975 put in a large crop.

"We had beautiful crops but nobody knew us," Mr. Moffat said. They started advertising, and that seemed to work. We got to know what people wanted."

The 1976 crop, was a "disaster" with too much rain, a fact Mr. Moffat accepted philosophically as one of the gambles farmers face daily.

However, this year they are offering 21 crops ranging from apples, broccoli and cauliflower to zucchini. The crops are looking good, he said. Prices are half what shoppers pay in supermarkets.

Running a pick-your-own farm is a family affair for the Moffats and they work from 8:30 a.m. to dusk, seven days a week from July to about Thanksgiving. In the fall, Kay Moffat will offer to their farm's visitors her own pickles and grape juice. The family, including their children, wear bright orange T-shirts to distinguish themselves from the pickers.

Near the entrance to the farm is a large map showing where the different crops are as well as the location of washrooms and drinking fountains. They also have a list of what pickers can and can't do. The family provides containers and also have large wheelbarrows for persons buying in bulk.

The number one problem, Mr. Moffat said, "is weeds." To combat them, the former shop instructor has designed and built a "weedmobile" out of two old cars. The unusual contraption gently pushes the crops aside while a set of tines cuts at the weeds. It beats hoeing and does the job. He has also built a multi-purpose power generator to run the irrigation system, an arc welder and the sprayer.

Moffat's philosophy is that as gasoline gets more expensive, his business will grow as a "one stop outdoor super-market."

"I'll jump for joy when it gets to be a big business," he said. The pick-your-own crop of John and Laura Hughes lasts for about one month. They have 4,000 cherry trees on their 80-acre farm protected from the weather by an outcropping of the Niagara Escarpment. They opened their farm, Braeside Cherry Farm on Bell

School Line near Milton, to cherry pickers three years ago.

"Pick your own is here to stay," she said. "People like it."

It is important at a pick-your-own farm to create a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, and have people working there who are out-going, she said. Response from the public is "terrific."

They offer two kinds of cherries - Montmorency, good for pies, jams and freezing and tart Morello good for wines and liquors as well as pies and jams. Some of their Morello crop is bought by McGuiness Distillery and the Hughes use "kid power" to harvest the crop by hiring local teens. One day a year they sell about 1,000 10-pound pails of pitted cherries with 10 per cent sugar, but only by advance order.

"But it's tremendous to see how many people save money by picking their own," she said. Besides baskets, the Hughes also supply pick-your-owners with recipes and freezing hints. They are members of the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association which offers the public pick-your-own crops or specialty farmers.

Mrs. Hughes believes there are five reasons why pick-your-own is being accepted by the public. Guaranteed freshness and guaranteed quality as well as real economic savings are three that complement the trend to return to home preserving. Pick-your-own becomes an engrossing as a hobby and provides an inexpensive way for the family to have an outing.

"Once people have done it," she said, "they come back. It becomes a yearly outing."

Being such believers in the pick-your-own phenomenon, the Hughes, naturally, pick their own fruits and vegetables at other farms, especially asparagus, which they freeze, along with raspberries, strawberries, peaches and

safety tip

Here's a Red Cross Safety Tip: When you go out on the water this summer, don't overload your boat. Make two trips. Play the safety game.

pears. In some cases they merely barter their cherries for what they like.

The farm of the Hayes family on 15 Sideroad west of Stewarttown is also a single crop operation - apples. But the 10.5-acre farm is just a "hobby farm," says Dennis Hayes who works with his father Ed in their sales agency.

The orchard has 500 trees with Melreds, Welfes, MacIntosh, Red and Golden Delicious, Quintyses, Tydemans Reds and Close, which are already in season.

And like the Hughes, the Hayes have available recipes and information about the nutritive qualities of apples.

The Hughes have their own cold storage and also sell apples at the roadside from July until March. They are considering getting into other crops as well and have successfully introduced a half-acre of pick-your-own asparagus, the first crop of the year.

Early in the picking season, most of the customers are local people, Mr. Hayes said. But in the fall they get a lot of people "looking for anything they can get from roadside markets. There's a trend towards it. More people are getting their own fresh fruit and vegetables then before."

It is just a "kid's business," is how Sonja Pettingill described the pick-your-own

black currant operation she and three brothers and sisters run on their farm on the Town Line about a mile above Norval. They have had the business for four years and like most other farmers had a bad year in 1976 when frost struck their 1,200 black currant bushes.

Nor does the black currant crop bring in much of a return, Sonja said, mostly because black currants are more popular in Europe than in Canada. You can make jelly, jam and juice from the berries which are high in Vitamin C content.

Because the berries are so small, the Pettingills advise pickers to bring their own

lawn chairs. They often go out with the families to help pick and give everyone a free glass of black currant juice.

Next year they are planning to hand out free recipes in an effort to increase the market. Much of the crop they pick themselves to turn into jam, jelly and juice for their own table.

The main part of running the black currant farm falls to the shoulders of Helen and John Pettingill, the youngest of seven children in the family, Sonja said, "but they hate picking." The farm is open from light to dusk.

Said Crista, another sister, "We seem to make a lot of friends at black currant time."



Terry Grignon of Guelph is working with the Hayes family to harvest the crop of Close apples. Standing in the midst of an apple tree, he wears a six quart basket on a harness for ease of picking.

Legal delays snarl line

Further legal delays face Ontario Hydro in its attempt to build a 550 Kv transmission corridor from Bradley to Georgetown as a result of a decision taken this week by the central corridor committee of the Interested Citizen's Group (ICG).

The central corridor committee, which represents the area north of Ballinafad to Colbeck, has joined the other ICG groups along the proposed corridor in objecting that the expropriation of land is not "fair, sound and reasonably necessary", and will fight Ontario Hydro in the courts to nullify the decision to expropriate.

The meeting of the central corridor committee was held in response to a disturbing offer from Ontario Hydro requesting early or immediate possession of some 90 properties, rather than the usual 120 day waiting period.

"Hydro has offered us a small amount of interest related to the value of our homes and land offered as a bribe for early possession of land they are expropriating," said Mrs. H. Switzer of Erin Township. "We are amazed at their attitude toward people, particularly in light of the Supreme

Recommend purchase

Finance administration committee Monday recommended that council purchase the street lights in Georgetown from the Hydro Commission for \$44,459.

The expenditure would save Halton Hills about \$10,000 in five years, treasurer Ray King told the committee. Last year, not counting maintenance, the town spent \$21,453.78 on street lighting. Maintenance costs were about \$16,000.

The hydro commission wants to sell the street lights because the town would be ahead on the depreciation costs and the commission would not have to budget for that amount. There would be no physical change in the work force and the town would be billed monthly for the maintenance service. Hydro commissioner Graham Farnell said.

Proposal rejected

Halton region council has rejected a proposal to lease 800 square feet of space in an industrial development near its regional headquarters for a one year sewer and water study.

Council turned down the recommendation although the \$6,000 cost had already been included in the budget of the study. Staff were instructed to find space in the region's two floors of office space at the Abbey Life Building on Harvester Road.

Court (of Ontario) decision that casts a great deal of doubt on the validity of the conclusions drawn by the Expropriation officer," said William Allen of Hillsburgh.

The Supreme Court of Ontario threw out both of Ontario Hydro's arguments that a general inquiry into distribution of electric power had been conducted by Dr. Omond Solandt and that alternate routes were not within the terms of reference for the inquiry officer.

The supreme court ruled that both positions taken by Ontario Hydro are untenable and that every party to the inquiry is permitted to present evidence and argument, and to examine and cross-examine witnesses as to alternate routes.

The ICG has contended for four years that if a complete independent study had been done originally, the present problems and delays would not exist today.



BEING PREPARED

Doll VanArragon and Mike Denjong, two local fishermen want the hot weather to continue, at least until they've had their fishing trip up north. Regardless of the humidity the two men have been working on the motor to get it in working order for a trip to Parry Sound.

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