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NEWS

Halton food tourism summit is told: Local food costs more for good reason...

By **Melanie Hennessey**
Special to The IFP

People need to “get over” how much it costs to buy locally sourced food and support farmers to ultimately create a sustainable food system.

That bold sentiment was among the messages delivered recently during the second annual Halton Region Food Tourism Summit, which brings together the local farming and culinary communities to help them put more locally-sourced foods on restaurant tables and support a viable economy. The day-long event at Country Heritage Park touched on everything from the ways farmers can get their products into the hands of local residents and chefs to how they can benefit from the large-scale cycling events hitting the region this year.

According to Damian Wills, local food manager with the Mustard Seed Co-op in Hamilton, one of the biggest challenges for food producers to overcome is a lack of understanding around why buying local can sometimes cost more.

“Local food costs what it does for good reason.

There’s a higher cost of production here; it’s not as cheap as what can be done in Mexico or California,” he explained. “Get over what it costs and let’s just support that local food system.”

He said farmers and food producers often end up devaluing their products’ worth in response to requests for lower prices from big buyers.

“We need to work harder at not just justifying, but creating an understanding of why it may cost more and the impact it has,” he said. “As a producer, as a grower, keep your worth where it is and don’t devalue what you’re doing.”

Wills went on to share details of the success experienced so far at the Mustard Seed Co-op, which is a member-owned and operated grocery store that sells products from more than 250 local farmers and producers.

“We have over 1,800 members who all bought into what it means to create a local, sustainable food system,” he said. “The more opportunities we have to purchase local food, the more it raises awareness about what families are doing in our community. It creates a connection and gets people interested in the producer or farmer.”

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