



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Nadine Lauren (left) and Heather Cass-Kerr, proprietors of Down Unders, display emu meat items available at their newly opened Highway 25 food stand.

# Emu burger anyone? It's not just like chicken

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
*The Champion*

Local burger chains now have a feathered foe fighting for a piece of the action.

Emus, the flightless birds that are native to Australia, are now available for consumption thanks to an adventurous farming foursome.

Longtime friends in rural Moffat Nadine and David Lauren, and Heather and Rob Kerr, were looking for a new business venture — one they could eventually pass down to their children — when the idea for emu burgers presented itself in the spring of 1995.

"I saw an article in the Toronto Star about this farmer in Whitby who was raising them," recalled Ms Lauren. "The concept interested us very much. We're all professionals with other jobs but we're also entrepreneurs at heart and wanted to try something new."

Their business hatched almost immediately.

Within six months half a dozen emus had been transported to the Moffat farm where time-consuming, painstaking harvesting has been done over the last two-and-a-half years.

Now the fun part begins as the Kerrs and Laurens reap the rewards through Down Unders, their Hwy. 25 food stand located next to Tim Horton's.

They opened just three weeks ago and already they're doing steady — if not spectacular — business.

Said Ms Kerr, "Business has mostly come from good word of mouth. We're not going to turn a profit overnight, but things have been pretty good."

"In addition to the four owners, we've got three employees who're helping run the stand. My 13-year-old son Jonathan will probably work there this sum-

mer as well."

On the surface emu burgers are hardly distinguishable from their beef counterparts. They look identical and taste remarkably similar.

Add a little ketchup or mustard and it's tough to tell them apart.

The only difference lies in nutritional value, which is one of the key selling points for Down Unders.

Emu contains less cholesterol and fat than any popular red or white meat. A 100 gram serving has just 54.7 mg of cholesterol and a mere 2.4 g of fat. Chicken has 80 mg of cholesterol and 4.3 g of fat while top sirloin has 61 mg of cholesterol and 4.4 g of fat.

The Australian delicacy — which has become known as the red meat of the future — also has less calories and slightly higher protein than chicken, sirloin, pork, veal or lamb.

And while Down Unders mostly deals in burgers, various cuts of frozen emu meat are available as well.

"We've got steaks, sausages and fillets. We've even got recipes available at the stand," said Ms Lauren.

And if that doesn't occupy enough of their time the Kerrs and Laurens also sell emu oil.

Rich in fatty acids and anti-inflammatory properties, emu oil is billed as an effective alternative to controlling carpal tunnel syndrome, arthritis and shingles.

Explained Ms Lauren, "We've got customers from as far away as the east coast. Our main priority is the emu burgers though. It's something we're hoping to leave for our kids."

"Maybe it'll even turn into a franchise someday."

For more information on the group's emu meat and oil products, call (519) 836-9128. Down Unders is open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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