

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

You may have noticed at the last two indoor Farmers' Markets that the York Region Food Network (YFRN) was there. We are delighted that they will be joining us again at the next two indoor markets, so I would like you to know something about them and what they do.

YFRN is a charitable non-profit that offers programs and education around access to healthy food. Their vision is "Food for Health-Food for All". Their programs range from community gardens to community kitchens and meals, and aquaponics. They are involved in supporting healthy food policy including leading the development of the York Region Food Charter, and through broad community engagement on food issues.

With the vision that produce is just the beginning, upStream is a 1,000 square foot space dedicated to aquaponics, a closed-loop innovative food system, which produces both protein (fish) and vegetables.

In this soilless system, fish effluent is used to fertilize vegetable growth, solving the issue of dealing with fish waste in aquaculture systems, and avoids having to add chemical fertilizers needed in hydroponic systems.

With this system, they are able to grow several varieties of greens—lettuces, arugula, herbs, pak choi, Swiss chard and kale to name but a few. Fresh local greens are a real treat in the middle of winter. Funds from the sale of upStream greens support the programs of YFRN.

Their programs offered through their Community Food Hub are based on 3 principles: access to healthy food; knowledge and skills about nutrition, local sustainable food and food preparation; and community engagement. Through a variety of programs including the Good Food Box, Gleaning, the Breakfast Drop-In and Kitchen Programs, they can demonstrate in a supportive environment that healthy food is nutritious, delicious and fun.

YFRN is the host agency for York Region Food for Learning, a group that supports healthy breakfasts and snacks in schools. Research has confirmed that serving children healthy food at school improves learning, develops healthy eating habits and supports a sense of community and participation in schools. They also provide support to schools that are interested in creating school gardens.

Why should people care about food? The answer really is quite simple; food is a basic human need and food is delicious and a wonderful way to bring people together. We all care about food, although perhaps not all in the same way: we use food for comfort, we care about our diets for reasons ranging from controlling weight to food sensitivities and staying healthy. We all make decisions about food several times a day.

There is so much information which seems to make food complicated, but preparing healthy food is really not that complicated and YFRN is able to help people to learn ways to value food differently and as a way to connect with nature, health, the economy, family and community. I recommend that you visit their table at each of the next indoor markets.

The Aurora Farmers' Market and Artisan Fair will be hosting TWO indoor markets in February. The first one will be on Family Day on Monday, February 16 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Armouries.

At the same time, the Town of Aurora will be having a number of family-friendly activities in Town Park, including ice skating. So after participating with your family in the outdoor activities, be sure to come inside to warm up, have a coffee or tea, something delicious to eat and see what our amazing vendors have available.

At press time, the following are the vendors who are expected to be at the Armouries market: The farmers will be 19th Avenue Farm, Highmark Farm, Oakridges Finest, Pioneer Honey, Snowden Farm and YFRN. The food vendors will include Jan's Country Pantry, Rustic Bread, Catharina's Kitchen, Boulangerie St. George and Dos Mariachis Restaurant. Green River Coffee will be there to provide coffee and tea. The artisans will include Catch my Drift, Eva Designs, Green Leaf Designs, Heartsease Co. and Kibo Soaps.

There will be another indoor market on Saturday, February 21st at the Aurora Cultural Centre from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

See you at the indoor market!