



Food of the Future challenges ideas of agriculture

By Brock Weir

As our population grows, our traditional methods of farming might not be able to keep up with demand. But new, innovative ideas for sustainable and ?community-based indoor agriculture? have been recently highlighted by Dr. Matt Hammond and Phil Fung in a new partnership with the Aurora Public Library.

On Thursday, April 20, the duo will host Food of the Future, an Earth Day presentation, through the Aurora Public Library's (APL) channels. The live, virtual presentation, at which the presenters will take questions from participants, has worked hand-in-hand with a model biome, which has taken pride of place in the Library Living Room since April 4 before being wrapped up this Saturday, April 22.

The biome, located near APL's central elevator, is a mix of hydroponics and aquaculture, bringing fish into the mix.

?As Phil and Matt are so passionate about the project, they started off saying they would like to do a little sample model and then, ?We don't want to have a little aquarium on top of the stands? We're going to build one that is 6.5 feet tall and we're going to attach it to the elevator,"? explains Reccia Mandelcorn, APL's Manager of Community Collaboration, with a chuckle. ?They wanted to give people the idea that you could grow kale, microgreens, and all kinds of stuff in there. The fish are a huge draw (for visitors to APL) and we even have a contest now where kids can name the fish they're looking at. When they go to look at the fish, the parents are talking to them about growing.?

Bringing the work of Fung and Hammond to APL is ?major,? says Mandelcorn as their engineering work and work on innovation has garnered them significant recognition in recent years.

?We are getting a lot of registration not only from our local community, but from different municipalities who are really interested in this project,? she says. ?I am personally really honoured that Phil and Matt decided to host this at Aurora Public Library because I think they would have been welcome in any municipality and certainly by any library and it is really big for us. I am so excited.?

Making this presentation particularly relevant for the community, she adds, is the awareness of what is happening to Ontario's Greenbelt and to local farmlands.

?The pandemic also brought up the whole supply chain and many people are living in condos or apartments and don't have access to

community gardens. I think the whole concept of food and food instability has hit people in a way that they haven't ever thought of before. This is a way of thinking of new ways to do agriculture that works with our changing urban environment. Even in Aurora, which is suburb, we look around us and see we are becoming more urban and we need to look at other ways of making food local and taking ownership of our food. Also, I think people are just excited about new technologies ? it's new technology that is really meaningful and what can be more meaningful than food that sustains us??

This week's presentation and installation is just one of the many ways APL has supported food programs. They have partnered with the York Region Food Network on several initiatives, including the Culinary Traveller program, which has resulted in the publication of some of the best-loved recipes of Aurorans who have roots in all parts of the world, as well as gardening programs.

?We are very interested in continuing our partnership with them and I think they are with us as well. If there are any other environmental groups in the area who are interested in partnering with the Library, we are very passionate,? says Mandelcorn. ?Food is community, it's culture, and certainly with our staff, we're very passionate about environmental concerns and about good food and bringing people together. We're happy to work with anybody!

?This is a small little piece that Phil and Matt are showing as an example of something larger that a municipality can take on as a project, but we have had people who have come through and said, ?We can actually do this in my own space,' so I think people are looking at this as a template for something creative they can do in their own homes. That is a very exciting side piece. We looked at it from a macro level but people are coming to say from a personal level how they can see this working within their own spaces, so I think that is very exciting, too.?

For more on Food of the Future, including registration, visit bit.ly/3Hjle8b. Showtime is 7 p.m.

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