

Buy Local? grows organically door-to-door through new Aurora business



By Brock Weir

Growing up in Mexico, Rafael Minassian and Lisette Palacios grew up with an abundance of fresh, organic produce.

Avocados were a great favourite, but so were apples and oranges – pretty standard fare for most North American tables. Having this produce readily available to them instilled in them what Rafael describes as a ‘love of everything that is fresh’, and the couple, now Aurora residents, are hoping to share this love with the residents of Aurora, King and Oak Ridges.

Minassian and Palacios came to Canada looking for a better quality of life. Mexico City was plagued with traffic, safety issues, water problems and pollution, he says, and they wanted to find further opportunities for themselves and their kids. Nine years later, when they were looking for their latest business venture, they found themselves sticking to this same principle of looking for a better life.

They are now the local franchise owners of Organics Live, a branch of the Toronto-based company founded in 2012 to bring together a collective of farmers in Southern Ontario to provide less-expensive fresh, organic produce to residents through home delivery.

‘It’s all about the clean food movement,’ Rafael explains. ‘With organic food, you are not getting into pesticides or any of those chemicals into the body, and we think that is one of the many factors contributing to so many illnesses. We tend to make these associations, so we thought if we were going to invest our time in a business, what better way than through promoting something that is healthy and that brings an actual benefit to the people around us?’

In their Toronto-based delivery service, Organics Live focuses on sourcing food from local farmers and producers to get the fresh goods directly into the hands of the consumers ‘with as little waste as possible.’

‘Our model is hyper-lean and focused on reducing waste across the board,’ said Lisette. ‘This enables us to support local growers, control costs, and ensure superior product quality. It is changing the game for organic food eaters. We’re building a sustainable local food system through a network of small business so that it is easier for consumers to get the clean food they want for less than they are paying at retail.’

Serving the local community was something very important to them, they say. In looking to be active members of the Aurora community – not to mention King and Oak Ridges – they wanted to foster these local connections between themselves and the consumer.

‘If it is vague or too wide-open, and you don’t have that connection with the community, it defeats the purpose,’ says Rafael. ‘We try to source as much as possible from local farms here in Ontario. Sometimes we have to supplement with produce from somewhere else, but it is locally focused. A lot of people try to promote ‘buy local’ but in many cases buying local, like conventional produce, probably isn’t doing much to benefit the environment as if you are using organic, even though you are bringing it from somewhere else.’

Through the fledgling business, customers can purchase a weekly box of fruit and vegetables to be delivered to the door, which is, at the end of the day, customizable depending on what’s in season and, of course, to your own personal taste.

‘This concept is what we call ‘Best of Season’,’ says Rafael. ‘You won’t get the same thing in each box every time. It changes week to week because we are looking at the market and getting the fresh fruit that is available every week. We try to assemble a box along those lines, offering a good mix of fruit and vegetables, but if you don’t want any fruits or vegetables in particular, you can exclude that from your delivery and do some customization.’

On their first delivery, Rafael and Lisette say they were thrilled to find organic avocados in their box. Whether that sold them on the concept or not, it brought back a nice taste of home.

‘We love everything that is fresh,’ he says. ‘This morning we had watermelon which was organic, not genetically modified, it came with all the seeds, so it reminded us of when we were kids eating those fruits in Mexico that they were not genetically modified, as opposed to the ones you get now without the seeds. Anything that would be fresh and anything that is guaranteed fresh, we have a bias towards!’

For more information on Organics Live, visit organicslive.com, or visit with Rafael and Lisette at the 25th Feast of Fields, which will be held at King’s Cold Creek Conservation Area this Sunday, September 7 from 1 ? 6 p.m.