



Huron Farms To Tables

Linton's pork catching the eye of country's top chefs



farmer that he is today.

In about 2008 or 2009, Jeff said he was burning out. He was overseeing a traditional, 500-sow, farrow-to-finish operation, while also managing another farm and he was hitting the wall.

He started to think outside of the box (or the country, it would turn out) and consider some other opportunities. Drawn to the United Kingdom for its unique and progressive farming methods, Jeff said his move to Scotland actually had a lot to do with his childhood readings and what he had heard about farming in the U.K. In story books, he said, you would see pictures drawn of farms full of a mix of animals, all minding their own business on the same patch of land. In a way, he wanted to see that natural image for himself.

The Ridgetown College graduate (Agriculture, of course) made his way to Scotland in 2010, spending three months on an outdoor sow farm with 500 animals. On his

website, Jeff says it was this experience that truly formed his husbandry skills and sharpened his skills with working with pigs outdoors.

This work in Scotland led directly to the founding of Linton Pasture Pork in 2014.

Though he knew he wanted to take his farming in a new direction after his time in Scotland, Linton said his business really started by accident, in a way. When his pet pig Thelma became pregnant by accident, that was the beginning of it all. There are now about 1,000 animals on his farm and they have all descended from Thelma in one way or another. If Linton Pasture Pork had a Mount Rushmore at its entrance, Thelma's face would have to be one of the four on it.

Jeff works with some basic principles in mind that have always been important to him, as a lifelong animal lover and someone who clearly understands that the

Continued on page 15

A new train of thought

Almost a decade ago, Jeff Linton of Walton decided to try something new with Linton Pasture Pork, an operation that aligns with his views on animal welfare, sustainability and the good of the environment. Now, his pork is the envy of the province and it's being served on some of the most impressive tables in Canada. *(Shawn Loughlin photo)*

By Shawn Loughlin
The Citizen

How did the son of a Huron County pork farmer turn into as much of a superstar pork farmer as a pork farmer can be? It all starts with a pig named Thelma.

Jeff Linton is one of the best-known names in Ontario pork. His Linton Pasture Pork is known across not just the province, but the country as the gold standard of what was once known as the other white meat. (This is a title that is far from fair with Linton's product, which, if you see any professional chefs - or Linton himself - sharing pictures of their creations with Linton's materials on social media, the meat is a glorious ruby red, if cooked correctly, almost akin to a coveted piece of steak.)

Founded between Walton and Blyth in 2014 - quickly approaching a 10th anniversary - Linton Pasture Pork has grown to be the most sought-after pork in Ontario. In an interview with *The Citizen*, Linton says his pork is featured in over 30 restaurants and between 10 and 15 butcher shops. The restaurants include Restaurant Pearl Morissette of Jordan Station, recently named the fifth-best restaurant in Canada, and Toronto's Prime Seafood Palace, the 17th-best restaurant in Canada and the best new restaurant of 2023, according to *Canada's 100 Best*. The butcher shops include Pasture Butchery, which Linton now co-owns. The shop, near The Beaches neighbourhood in east Toronto, specializes in whole-animal

butchery and pasture-raised animals from Ontario.

Linton now has a successful, unique and sustainable farm - which is all he ever wanted - and his pigs are the first choice of some of the best chefs in Canada. Well... how did he get here?

Jeff is the son of David Linton, who is a traditional pork farmer in Huron County. Jeff grew up on the farm and was no stranger to the

business of pork farming. However, even when Jeff was young, things were done differently by the Lintons.

David didn't come from a long line of pork farmers like many other farmers in Huron County do, Jeff said, so he was doing things his own way from the beginning. Jeff says that his father's work with animal welfare and environmental wellness really helped shape the



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Huron Farms To Tables

Top restaurants look to Linton for their pork



On the move

Linton Pasture Pork does things a bit differently in the warm weather months and that commitment has led to superior flavour, according to owner Jeff. *(Shawn Loughlin photo)*

Continued from page 14
environment is changing. Sustainability, animal welfare and care for the environment are all very important to him and he started Linton Pasture Pork with those principles in the hopes that he would find like-minded partners along the way.

It all began when he connected with a butcher shop in Waterloo - The Bauer Butcher. The farm's expansion can be traced back to that first relationship.

From there, Jeff worked with his first fan and supporter to expand into the Toronto market and get his product in front of people with discerning taste who would appreciate and value his unique approach to farming and taste the difference in the pork he was producing.

On the restaurant side of things, Jeff says that the aforementioned Restaurant Pearl Morissette was one of the first establishments to support his work at Linton Pasture Pork. The chefs there - Daniel Hadida and Eric Robertson - have been big fans of the pork produced just west of Walton for years and Jeff considers them friends. He has been to the restaurant - located on a 42-acre farm in Ontario's wine country, which also supports the Pearl Morissette winery - numerous times and says that, for his money, they have made him some of the best meals he's ever eaten.

He also delivers weekly to Prime Seafood Palace in Toronto, the new restaurant by Canadian celebrity chef Matty Matheson.

His connections reach much farther, however, as Jeff maintains a very active social media presence, predominantly on Instagram. He posts daily (it's good for his business and to establish connections, but Jeff admits to not loving social media on a personal level), sharing pictures or videos

from the farm and the sentiments from happy customers and chefs enjoying his pork both near and far. His followers include chef Todd Perrin of Mallard Cottage in St. John's Newfoundland, Langdon Hall Executive Chef Jason Bangerter, chef Zach Keeshig of Naagan in Owen Sound, the restaurant accounts for Eataly Toronto and the Buca group of restaurants in Toronto, as well as some of Montreal's best restaurants and chefs, including Elena, and Marc-Olivier Frappier, the former chef of Joe Beef and current chef and co-owner of Mon Lapin, which, this year, *Canada's 100 Best* named the best restaurant in the country.

These kinds of partnerships and relationships are essential to Jeff. In fact, when he has people approach him about working for him, he almost always resists, saying he's not looking for employees, but for partners. He's doing something unique and interesting and he wants to surround himself with many people doing the same things (so, by definition, different things) as he is doing.

He has those kinds of partnerships to thank for endeavours like Pasture Butchery and other interesting things that are happening at his farm.

For example, he just planted a number of peach trees at the farm that came from someone associated with Restaurant Pearl Morissette. The fruit, which can be used in wine-making, will now grow on his property, and Jeff is excited to see the results.

This is just one step along the journey for him. He views the farm property as one big entity with many moving parts. The naturalized pasture, as he has let it grow in and do its own thing, has yielded wonderful and unique results that only serve to improve every bite his pigs are taking out in the fields. As

property for personal use to aid in keeping the soil interesting and diverse.

The pigs are housed, if they so choose, in small shelters that have mostly been constructed by Jeff himself. The first ones were thrown together to the best of his ability with materials he had on the farm. The design and construction have both improved over the years, but they are still not immune to some of the pigs opting to pick them apart from time to time.

All of this work has led to the steady growth of Linton Pasture Pork.

Jeff began with a handful of animals (as mentioned, almost by mistake) and a mad dash to find pasture for them wherever friends and neighbouring farmers could spare it and he has grown into a household name for those in the food service industry and for those who prize good flavour and ethical, sustainable and environmentally-sensitive farming practices.

Now, he's ready to expand. Jeff is working on the creation of an extensive processing facility on his property that he hopes will aid in the creation of dry-aged pork for charcuterie over several years, as well as some other tasty creations.

Most charcuterie is imported, Jeff says, and it's not necessarily coming from choice animals in

those countries. Being able to create his own, from his own animals, he says, could be a game-changer. It's certainly an experiment he thinks is worth trying.

It all started because he needed a shed. Plans began for the construction of a shed and things continued to expand from there. Now, he will have some processing space (he is able to break down and butcher animals himself, but he says he needs a lot more time to do it than the professionals need) and a small event space. It will be busy soon as his wife Keresa turns 40 and a restaurant from Toronto will be coming up to host a special celebratory dinner in the space in the coming weeks. However, long-term, Jeff hopes to turn it into a space that could be utilized for different pop-up culinary opportunities. For example, he and Keresa have discussed hosting a Caribbean pop-up on summer weekends, drawing in drivers from Blyth Road on their way to or from Lake Huron.

He has also toyed with the idea of a small retail space in the building, but he's not sure. Much of his pork makes its way out of Huron County, but he'd like to reconnect, for lack of a better term, with the local market - he just needs to know that the demand is there. So, for now,

Continued on page 16

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Huron Farms To Tables

Grassroots offers visitors a slice of farm life

By Scott Stephenson
The Citizen

Foodies far and wide travelled down a stretch of Bruce Road 86 between Lucknow and Whitechurch on Friday to enjoy one of Bruce County's most unique dining experiences - Fired Up Friday at Grassroots Farm. It's a chance for locavores to visit the Morrison family and eat farm-fresh pizza with friends, family and neighbours. It's a decidedly seasonal weekly event, occurring from July to September.

If you've never stopped by Grassroots Farm, you may not have noticed the rustic sign advertising wood-fired pizza on the side of Highway 86. Or you may have observed their travelling trattoria producing fresh pizza at local events, or perhaps you've seen their vacuum-sealed pizza in the freezer of Shanahan's in Goderich and Penny's in Blyth or at marina mercantile shop Delish Us in Bayfield Harbour. It's safe to say there's no wrong way to discover this innovative farm-to-table family business, which is quickly becoming the area's worst-kept secret.

Grassroots is the brainchild of Roger and Vicky Morrison. They first dreamed-up farm-fresh pizza while operating a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) garden. In the CSA model of



Pastoral Pizza Place

The Grassroots Farm is located on Bruce Road 86 just outside of Lucknow. (Scott Stephenson photo)

farming, community members support specific farms in their local food network through subscription or membership, and, in exchange, they share in the yields from each harvest. Risks and rewards alike are shared by patrons and producers, which leads to stronger community connections to local agriculture.

A majority of the rainbow of vegetables adorning Grassroots pizzas comes from Pfenning's Organic Farm in New Hamburg but some specialty ingredients are

sourced from a CSA garden and friend to Grassroots - Firmly Rooted Farm in Belgrave. In addition to helping the Morrisons top their pizza, Firmly Rooted also offers season-by-season food shares in a variety of volumes, and sells seedlings and produce to the public. Firmly Rooted has also teamed up with Meeting Place Organic Farm

near St. Helens and Goderich's Weth Mushrooms to create both egg and mushroom shares as add-on options for their subscribers.

For the Morrisons, running a CSA garden meant there was an influx of crop sharers who came to the garden every Friday to pick up their vegetables. It seemed like a natural next step to start cooking something tasty for loyal locals to snack on while they waited for their produce. The two soon constructed a mud masonry oven and started baking dough topped with whatever extra vegetables they had on hand.

The popularity of the community garden pizza project encouraged the Morrisons to build a weighty behemoth of a pizza oven on the back of an open-air trailer that could go to farmers' markets and, during the pandemic, breweries. The portability gave a wider range of people a chance to try the Morrisons' wares, but they knew the cumbersome set-up could be streamlined. A new custom trailer and much lighter, stainless steel oven were constructed, and their original travelling oven found a new home as the heart of the farm's pizza operation.

Roger remains pizzaiolo extraordinaire and Vicky focuses on education and programs that enrich the community. Their son Blair

keeps operations running smoothly, while daughter-in-law Courtney's
Continued on page 17

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'Pig' dreams come true for Jeff Linton

Continued from page 15

that remains a "maybe, one day" on the list.

While Keresa does her part with Linton Pasture Pork behind the scenes, her full-time job is as a nurse at Huronlea Home for the Aged in nearby Brussels. The farm is doing well and life is good at the moment. As a result, Jeff says he doesn't want to take out high-interest loans to complete the facility. The goal is to open the building in earnest next spring, but it will all be dependent on funds and progress. He's not planning on rushing anything.

And, as the farm is continuing to expand, so too is Jeff's ambition. While he has found success with many of the well-known, heritage pork breeds known around the world, he has recently entered the world of innovation and created his own breed of pig, which he hopes, over time, will take over his entire farm. And, if he says so himself, he did pretty well on his first try.

Jeff bred Berkshire and Yorkshire (both from England) with Kunekune (originally from New Zealand) pigs to create what he calls the LPP (Linton Pasture Pork)

White breed and the early results have been fantastic. He says the animals are docile and calm, while also extremely productive in terms of having piglets. And, while he admits he might be biased, he thinks they turned out pretty cute as well.

While he may have struck gold with his first breed creation, Jeff says he may keep things there for a while and let the results pan out. However, another breed in his future is certainly not out of the question.

Right now, however, a walk through the pastures at Jeff's farm will yield the beautiful sights of many different types of pig, different colours, hair patterns and temperaments abound at the farm, an dall of them live in (more or less) harmony.

The land is rolling, beautiful and alive - and full of little piglets scurrying throughout the greenery, so inconspicuous you could be forgiven for missing them. And, due to their lives in the pasture, they are often not afraid of human interaction.

For more information on Linton Pasture Pork and Jeff's work, visit lintonpasturepork.com.

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