

this & that

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■ HEATHER PRITCHARD

PROFILE

Eat slow

At the forefront of a food revolution by Correy Baldwin

WHEN HEATHER PRITCHARD first tried marketing organic produce back in 1986, she didn't realize it would be such a tough sell. "It was hard for us to sell what many people saw as an expensive product," she says. "They didn't see the value in it or didn't understand why they should be supporting local farms or local growers."

But Pritchard was determined to create a food revolution—what we now know as the local or slow food movement. In 1993, fellow farmer Herb Barbolet helped to launch FarmFolk CityFolk, an organization devoted to building up a local and sustainable food system in B.C. Pritchard immediately got involved and eventually took over as executive director. Today, she's the organization's program manager.

A sustainable food system, Pritchard explains, is one that maintains local control at every level, from production to processing, to marketing and distribution, to consumption itself. "The more we do this, and the less waste we produce, the healthier and more resilient the system is, and the more likely it will give returns back to the community and to the people who keep the system rolling," she says. "The more that we can work in close proximity and close community with each



other, the healthier the system."

Things have changed since FarmFolk CityFolk's early days. Today, organic farming in Canada is a \$3.5-billion industry and the fastest growing agri-food sector in the

country. Pritchard notes the huge growth in farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture food bins (CSAs). When FarmFolk CityFolk started promoting CSAs seven years ago, at most three producers participated in

the program. "Now we list around 50 on our website," she says.

"First we had to try and convince people to eat locally," says Pritchard. "That seems to be working." The new challenge is meeting demands of local consumers, and Pritchard is making sure today's generation of farmers is ready to fulfill the need for more production.

Pritchard works closely with the Young Agrarians, a partner network with FarmFolk CityFolk made up of young producers. The rise of young people interested in farming, she says, is the biggest change in the last five years, and the most exciting. "There are hundreds of young people. They're meeting and having potlucks on each other's farms and learning from each other. They're young pioneers."

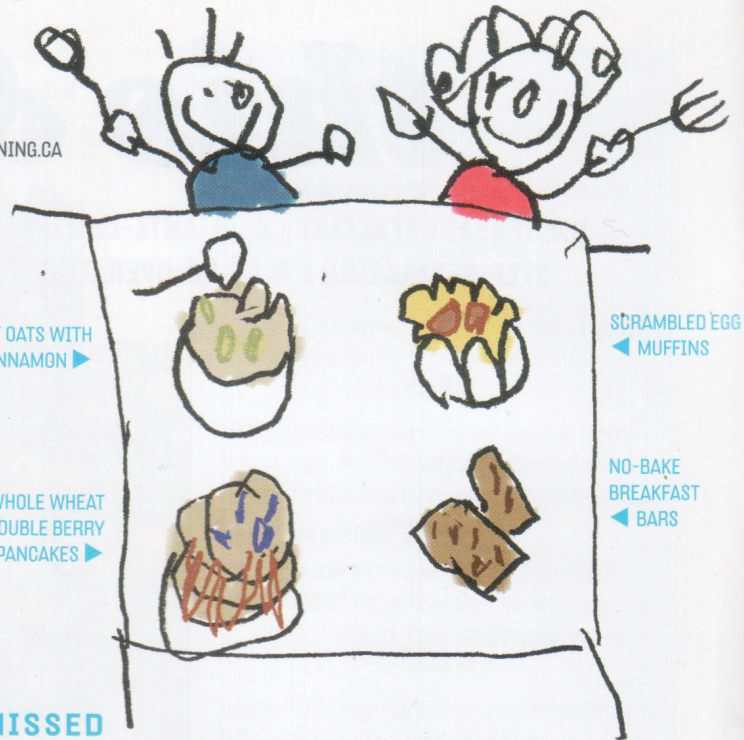
At the heart of all her projects is partnership and collaboration. "We almost never take on a project alone," she says. "We support what others are doing, to see how we can bring our strengths to their projects."

As a charity, FarmFolk CityFolk can access funds that would otherwise be unavailable to smaller organizations. They have supported several networks and movements in this way until those groups had the capacity to strike out on their own. This insistence on partnership helped build what is now a strong network of organizations and activists, involved in everything from public awareness building to land conservancy.

Pritchard is leading the charge on a new project to create a land trust for producers who otherwise couldn't afford to purchase land. Pritchard refers to this as a foodland trust, rather than a farmland trust, emphasizing aboriginal perspectives of land use. "When we talk about farmland, we're only talking about food production," she explains. "We don't ever talk about the land that supports foraging and hunting and gathering." The foodland trust will look at land from a permaculture perspective. "We support a style of agriculture that is much more respectful of the topography and the wildlife corridors that surround the farm," says Pritchard. "If we have wild berries and mushrooms and deer on our property, better that it would stay that way."

Changing attitudes and relationships with the food we eat can still be a struggle, but after three decades Pritchard has seen—and created—enormous, positive change. "I'm choosing to be optimistic," she says. "I'm not ignorant about the challenges, and I can get discouraged. But I work with such a wonderful group of people who are all rooting for change."

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EASILY MISSED

Balanced meal

The case for universal school breakfast programs
by Melissa Myers

THOUSANDS OF PROGRAMS ACROSS CANADA are desperately trying to ensure all students get a proper meal to prepare them for school. Farm to School, Breakfast Clubs of Canada, and Breakfast for Learning are some of the organizations that feed kids who go to school hungry each day. According to Breakfast for Learning's Annual Report, the charity fed more than 349,500 Canadian school kids in over 3,300 programs nationwide in 2013, ranging from 1,516 programs in Ontario to nine in Nunavut.

But as well-intentioned as these programs are, they are not without their problems. In 2008, Patricia Williams, a Halifax-based nutrition professor, headed a study that found "unintended negative effects, such as stigmatization, exclusion and dependency" are realities of some programs. Universal meal plans can act as a solution to the stigma. Such plans avoid labeling students as "needy" while making sure no one goes hungry, says Fiona Bowser, FoodShare Toronto's student nutrition community development senior manager. "When [morning meals] are served in a classroom to every student in the classroom," she says, "then everybody's the same."

Meanwhile, finding a solution is growing more urgent. One in eight households in Toronto experienced food insecurity in 2011, according to the latest Toronto Vital Signs report. Households with children are more likely to be grouped in this category. Low-income and one-parent families are at an even higher risk. It's not necessarily an expensive fix, either. The Toronto District School Board suggests a morning meal or breakfast should cost, on average, \$1.02 per elementary school student and \$1.59 per high school kid.

It's in provinces' interests to fund food programs in every school across Canada where there's a need, says Stephanie Segave, southwest region manager of the Ontario Student Nutrition Program and co-chair of the network. And yet, Canada is the only G8 country without a national school food program. Even with the efforts of thousands of food programs in schools across Canada, one third of elementary school students and nearly two thirds of high school students go without breakfast every day. "It's a major oversight," says Segave, "to not see that return on investment on a universal program that gives healthy snacks to kids."