

# Farm-to-Table works but consumers want proof

Farmer who produces artisanal chicken says it's all about personal credibility



**BY TOM VAN DUSEN**  
The writer lives in Russel County  
tomvandusen99@yahoo.com

**K**emptville – The farm-to-table mantra is starting to be met with skepticism on the part of many consumers who see it as a marketing ploy that's overused and often unsubstantiated, says a local producer raising meat birds under the Chicken Farmers of Ontario artisanal program.

Bart Millson, owner of Kemptville Chicks, says the mantra has lost value; what's required now is for small producers to develop personal relationships and credibility with their customers. He learned the hard way, growing a first batch of 200 six-pound dressed artisanal chickens, only 18 of which sold.

Since then, the output has grown to an anticipated 2,000 birds expected to be sold this year to a repeat clientele which has been developed through local publicity, a detailed website, testimonials, and public presentations: "The key is personal connection and trust."

They'll pay premium prices



**Bart Millson: "The key is personal connection and trust."**

but customers demand 100-per cent transparency in growing, handling and processing practices. Birds are raised over three-four, 11-week growth cycles.

Millson was one of the speakers at the third North Grenville Rural Summit April 12-13 on the former Kemptville College campus; the event is intended to underscore potential opportunities in agricultural production and processing in North Grenville and surrounding area.

It's a time for local entrepreneurs to share information about emerging agricultural practices, innovations, sustainability and the business side of growing, producing and selling, said North Grenville Mayor Nancy Peckford in opening the conference.

Combined with a small trade show, other concurrent presentations covered vertical farming, regulatory changes, organic farming, succession planning, agri-food startups, respecting food sources, challenges of running a winery, small-batch brewing, heritage livestock, robotics, the cannabis sector, and business planning.

Millson and his partner purchased 42 acres near Kemptville in 2003 which they cash cropped. Several years later, they hatched Kemptville Chicks under the four-year-old CFO artisanal program which permits raising up to 3,000 meat birds without quota.

As Millson pointed out, the program has been "embraced" with some 150 participants enrolled across the province, confirmed Patricia Shanahan, CFO Director of Community Business Development who had an information booth at the Summit. While there's no application fee, producers pay CFO 25 cents per bird, Shanahan explained.

She was on a tour of Eastern Ontario visiting some artisanal farmers, checking accommodations, conditions and practices. It's important to CFO, she said, that its commitment to animal care, health and welfare be adhered to at the artisanal level.

"There's room for everybody," Shanahan said when asked if there's any concern among quota producers that



**Patricia Shanahan: "There's room for everybody."**

artisanal growers – who must target non-traditional markets – are getting too big a piece of the pie. "The chicken business is so good these days there are no complaints."

Millson emphasized that his chickens are genuinely free range, eating grass, bugs or all grain, and not kept in rotating pasture cages. He believes in raising healthy "dumb lovable" chickens, either conventional (\$4.75-pound) or non-certified organic (\$6.25-pound), for his customers and family.

Don't expect much in the way of profits for five years, Millson cautioned, citing time needed to fully invest in infrastructure and determine long-term viability; flexibility is essential. The payoff is the "inherent satisfaction" of running your own business.

Although small in comparison to big farming, niche production such as Kemptville Chicks contributes to the local economy, Millson said, estimating he'll drop \$30,000 with nearby suppliers this year.

## Well-financed activists push a fear-based agenda on food

The federal government needs to help educate the public about the reality of GM crops

**BY ALEX BINKLEY**  
Ontario Farmer

**O**ttawa - The Canadian Food Inspection Agency needs to crack down on false and misleading labels about GM foods, says Robert Saik, an agrifood entrepreneur and commentator.

CFIA should order grocery stores and food companies to remove false labels about GM products because they create uncertainty and doubt among consumers, he told the Commons agriculture committee.

"When you go to the grocery store you will see a non-GMO butterfly sticker that appears on things like maple syrup, non-

GMO maple syrup," he said.

"Well there aren't any genetically engineered maple trees. Non-GMO Catelli pasta; there isn't any genetically engineered durum wheat. Non-GMO Hunts tomato sauce; there aren't any genetically engineered tomatoes."

Other examples he cited included non-GMO Himalayan rock salt, non-GMO tea, non-GMO seaweed extract, non-GMO coconuts, non-GMO spinach, non-GMO lettuce, non-GMO bacon for which there are no genetically modified sources.

Saik said the labels cash in on a fear-based agenda being pushed by activists to create "uncertainty and doubt in the consumers. It's estimated that between \$2.5 billion and \$3 billion is circulated annually through activist organizations bent on spinning fear, uncer-

tainty and doubt."

The groups wants to create uncertainty in the marketplace, he said. "They do this because they have an agenda and part of that agenda is to drive food costs up based on labels."

He urged the committee and the government "to help the public to understand that GMO genetic engineering is not an ingredient. It's a very poor moniker for a description of modern breeding processes."

The government also needs to defend the food safety system, he said. "Health Canada's recent ruling on glyphosate would be an example but we also need to recognize that the novel trait registration system that we have in this country is a strong one." It's under novel traits that the existing GM crops are registered.

He said that grapefruit used

to be white-fleshed until scientists and plant breeders used mutagenesis to turn it red-fleshed. The fruit was exposed "to nuclear radiation, specifically gamma radiation that scrambled the chromosomal complex of the grapefruit turning it from white-fleshed to red-fleshed. That's why you have red-fleshed grapefruit today. This is called mutagenesis. It's a breeding process."

Researchers in the Okanagan "figured out how to flick off three to four enzymes inside of an apple to prevent the apple from growing brown.

"Which one is GMO? Well, in fact, it's the apple that's GMO," he said. The grapefruit could "be labelled organic, non-GMO even though the chromosomal complex was scrambled with nuclear radiation."

"In Canada we have all kinds of examples of people benefiting from GMO technology," he said. "If you know of anybody who is being kept alive through insulin injections those are GMO medicines. Haemophiliacs are being kept alive through GMO medicines and most of the hard cheese that we eat in North America is GMO because the coagulant is a GMO or genetically engineered coagulant called chymosin.

"In Canada we register our products based on novel traits. I would encourage the standing policy committee to fight for that and to retain that in Canada because it's a level-headed approach to how we look and study the breeding processes and the crops and livestock that are being brought forward."