

Growing Locally: FoodShare meets with local farmers to discuss direct marketing and ethnic foods. **By Mark-Jan Daalderop**

Recently Loblaw Companies Ltd., the supermarket giant, made a decision to chop 800 to 1,000 office jobs as part of its restructuring. Another restructuring initiative is to reduce the number of farmers it buys from to make ordering more efficient.

I recently spoke about this with two farmers who supply produce to Loblaw's at FoodShare's annual farmers meeting at Everdale Environmental Learning Centre and organic farm. One of the farmers is a local sweet potato grower and the other is a local organic grower and distributor.

Selling to Loblaw's requires a farmer to get big or get out, a mantra of the early industrial agricultural movement. Loblaw's saves time and money by buying from a select few supersized farms. The smaller farms are out of luck. This may now, unfortunately, include the sweet potato farmer that I spoke with. Tension around this issue was palpable and there was agreement that the future of farming is selling directly to consumers.

FoodShare is working towards sourcing all of its local produce directly from smaller farmers in Ontario. We currently source potatoes, turnips, cabbages, carrots, apples, pears, and onions directly from farmers and much more during the growing season. Purchasing directly from farmers usually results in lower prices and in better quality.

The growth of a market for ethnic foods was also a topic of conversation at the meeting, as most of these exotic foods are still imported. Although there are many ethnic vegetables that can be grown in Ontario's Zone 5-6 climate there are several barriers preventing farmers from grow-

ing them here. Many of the farmers are not experienced in growing crops like okra or ethnic varieties of eggplant and do not have the technology to efficiently plant and harvest. One farmer attempted to grow okra without success due to the excessive cost of picking it. Peter Mitchell, a University of Guelph researcher, is working on a project, funded by the Green Belt Foundation, to help train new farmers, mostly immigrants, to grow ethnic crops. Peter hopes to connect immigrant farmers with established farmers.

FoodShare hopes to provide better service to multicultural communities and feed a growing desire for ethnic food in the city by working with farmers to purchase ethnic foods locally.

While purchasing directly from farmers and growing more ethnic vegetables will ultimately help both farmers and our urban communities, the importance of educating communities about food issues is paramount. Food retailing giants like Loblaw's need feedback from their customers that we want to be able to purchase locally-grown products. They have already seen the market trend towards organics and have responded. Now it's time to make them see that locally-grown is just as important.

Some ethnic foods that can be grown here:

Okra, Bok Choy, Daikon, Bitter Melon, Vegetable soybeans, Sweet potatoes, Mustard greens, Burdock root, Asian Eggplants, Coriander/Cilantro, Lemon Grass, Sorrel, Purslane, Horseradish, Ground cherries, French Dandelion, Fennel, Hot pepper (green house), Vegetable Amaranth (Calaloo) Malabar spinach, Jicama, Tomatillos and more--but first the farmers have to know what we want and where to get the seeds.

Spring is just around the corner! at **Seedy Saturday** on **March 17th** from **10 am to 3 pm** at 707 Dundas West (Scadding Court Community Centre at Dundas & Bathurst)

Food Share

Field to Table Centre

90 Croatia St. Toronto, ON M6H 1K9

t: 416. 363. 6441 xt 221

f: 416. 363 0474

e: info@foodshare.net

www.foodshare.net





recipes

Stir-Fried Chicken & Bok Choy

- 1/2 cup chopped green onions
- 1 TBS fresh minced ginger
- 1 whole skinless, boneless chicken breast cut into bite-sized pieces
- 3/4 cup sliced fresh shiitake or button mushrooms
- 2 cups chopped bok choy
- 1 TBS soy sauce
- 1 TBS rice vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Pinch of red pepper flakes

Stir fry the scallion in a teaspoon of oil in a non-stick wok or sauté pan for 2 minutes. Add ginger. Continue to stir-fry for another minute and add chicken, stirring constantly. After 2 to 3 minutes, add mushroom and bok choy. Continue to stir fry for another 3 to 4 minutes and add soy sauce, rice vinegar, salt and pepper. Serves 2.

Bok Choy with Ginger Vinaigrette

- 1 pound bok choy
- 1 TBS vinegar (white wine vinegar preferred)
- 2 tsp dijon mustard
- 2 tsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 small glove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 TBS fresh ginger, finely chopped or grated

Separate bok choy leaves and rinse under cold water to clean. Place in steamer and steam until stalks begin to turn translucent and are soft when pierced. Combine vinegar, mustard, soy, etc. and mix well.

After bok choy is steamed you have two options:

1. Chop up piece into bit size pieces while still warm and pour the ginger vinaigrette over.

or

2. Plunge steamed bok choy into cold water to crisp it back up. Drain and cool. Then chop and pour ginger vinaigrette over.

Makes 4 - 1 cup servings

featured this week: BOK CHOY

Cultivated in China since ancient times, bok choy is found in soups and stir-fries, appetizers and main dishes. Bok choy's popularity comes from its light, sweet flavor, crisp texture and nutritional value. Not only is bok choy high in Vitamin A, Vitamin C and calcium, but it is low in calories. Bok choy, or *brassica chinensis* to use its scientific name, is classified as a cabbage. Nonetheless, bok choy bears little resemblance to the round European cabbages found in western supermarkets.



Common name variations for bok choy include pak choy, pak choy, bok choy, spoon cabbage, taisai, celery mustard, and Chinese mustard.

Baby bok choy is smaller and more tender than mature bok choy. Shanghai pak choy is similar to bok choy but has pale green stalks with leaves that are just slightly darker than the stalk.

The most distinct comparison between bok choy and Chinese cabbage is in appearance. Bok choy has loosely clustered leaves with no compact head, while Chinese cabbage has either a cylindrical or barrel-shaped head.

Chop off enough of the base of the bok choy plant before washing so that stalks can be cleaned individually. Rinse stalks and leaves under running water, using a vegetable brush if they are especially dirty at the base of the stalk.

Bok choy stalks can be consumed raw with dip, or chopped and used in salads. Bok choy has a high water content and becomes limp very quickly upon cooking. It should be cooked very quickly over high temperature so that the leaves become tender and the stalks stay crisp. In Chinese stir-fried dishes and soups, bok choy is added toward the end of the cooking process. Since the leaves cook much more quickly than the stalks, it's a good idea to add the stalks first and then the leaves about a minute later. Cut the stalks into 1/2-inch (1.25cm) pieces before cooking.

Look for bok choy with firm stalks and leaves. Avoid yellowing or wilted leaves. Store in an unsealed plastic bag. Bok choy generally keeps well and will stay fresh for more than a week, but should be used in four to five days for best flavor.

DELIVERIES

for the week of: March 13th
orders are due 5 pm Tues. March 6th

for the week of March 20th
orders are due 5pm Tues. March 13th



e. gfb@foodshare.net - tel 416 392-1629 - fax. 416 392-6650
(at temporary location)