



enviroed4all® - Family Farm Snapshots-

an educational resource at <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/> for the

2014 International Year of Family Farming

“Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth”

Red Apples +, Orangedale, Nova Scotia

Our Family

Can you imagine the fun we had raising our family of six boys on a **mixed farm**?

We live in Orangedale, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, in eastern Canada, near the Bras d’Or lakes. We used to produce a lot of food on our family farm back when we had eight mouths to feed! The boys are grown up now, and there are only two of us left. We have **off-farm jobs** too now: I work as a teacher and my husband is a bridge inspector. He also makes a lot of our preserves. So although we are busy with these jobs, we **still** love to **eat fresh food** which we grow for ourselves and to share. So we are still **family farming- part-time**.

Do you know where **Cape Breton** is? Cape Breton is a small island in the eastern part of Canada, on the North Atlantic. It is part of the province of Nova Scotia, meaning New Scotland, on the east coast of Canada. So, about 40% of the people here are of **Scottish** descent, including us. The original Indian inhabitants, the **Mi’kmaq**, called this “Mi’kmaqi”.



We work together on our family farm. When they were young, the **boys** all helped with **farm chores**. They would also **sell fresh produce and vegetables** at our local farmers market on the weekend. Though, frequently they would ironically buy junk food with the proceeds!



As well as **food for us**, one year, my eldest son planted a market garden to make some **extra money**. But a new opportunity arose and he left the farm ... and us with a huge harvest! What could we do? We had trouble convincing our neighbours that we really did want to give a lot away! And there was still plenty to sell at the local market!



Farmers here also **share some work**, helping each other. We formed the “**Orangedale Farmers Co-op**” so local farmers can help each other with fencing, repairs and other requirements. The **L’Arche (Larch) community** comes each year to help harvest our apples.

Our Farm

Our land is **hilly**, with **brooks** and **streams** in it. Our mixed farm of **325 acres** has:

- **stock**, and on the hay days of our farm when we had all the boys at home that meant
 - about 35 **beef cattle**,
 - a **Jersey cow**, named Elaine
 - **Pigs**
 - **Hens**
 - **Bees** - my husband was one of the largest beekeepers in Cape Breton. He often took them to local farmers with blueberry fields.
- **crops**, - for hay over winter
- **vegetables** – a huge array
- and **an apple orchard**. - Its blossom is in the photo on top and the fruit is below it.



Soils

The Westbrook Series soil is quite nice and **light** and dries out early in the Spring. It benefits from **lots of manure**, which helps it to hold the moisture. With **lots of rain**, where it goes can be a problem for farming – here it is into the orchard, where there was poor **drainage**.

Can you see the slope in the photo above going down from the house to the orchard?

To improve this, we had the **ground ‘sub-soiled’** to form an **underground ditch** so that water in the soil would run down hill quicker. This was done with a kind of ball on the end of the four-wheel drive shaft being pulled through the ground about 3 feet underground.

Climate

Nova Scotia has a **moderate climate** with **lots of rain**. Winter temperatures get down below freezing, while summers are up in the warm 20C’s. The **Spring is late**, because the Atlantic Ocean keeps the weather cooler as ice melts in the north Atlantic! Our proximity to the Atlantic Ocean also allows us to **farm late into the fall**.

It is beautiful here in late Spring, Summer and the Fall. In small communities all around the island in Fall, we have the Celtic Colors International Festival with concerts and cultural events. People come from all over the world to attend this spectacular event each year.

Our produce - **‘Feeding the world’** means **‘Feeding ourselves’ and our local community**

Nova Scotia’s moderate climate is well-suited to **dairying, apples, berries** (like strawberries and blueberries) **and mixed farming**, but not wheat. Our produce is for our family first, then sold locally between farmers and at farmer’s markets on Nova Scotia.

As a family of eight, food for us first took a bit, but there was still plenty for sale:

- **milk** from Elaine, our Jersey cow, was enough for us and five other families.
- Our **hens** gave us **eggs** for our cooking
- the **beef cattle and litters of pigs** were sold locally
- **Vegetables** from our large gardens that we didn’t need, went for sale at the farmer’s market. Now we just grow food to feed our family. This year, it is nice to have fresh:
 - **artichokes** – dug in the early Spring
 - **aspargus** - delicious on toast
 - **beans**
 - **carrots.**
 - **horse radish** – dug in the early Spring
 - **lettuce,**
 - **rhubarb** - a nice treat on ice cream in the Spring
 - **squash**
- our **bees** pollinate our plants, and other farms
- **Fruit** from our apple trees – shared through the l’Arche community.

The Apple Orchard

Doesn’t the blossom on the apple trees in this photo look pretty? Without pollination of the blossom, though, we would get no red apples to harvest and eat. They need our bees for this job!



As you can see from the size of the trees, they weren’t planted yesterday. We planted them as one-year ‘whips’ about 25 years ago. To be able to buy in bulk, we formed a “Cape Breton Fruit Tree Association”, making the trees quite cheap (\$Can6.00 each). They were delivered straight from the nursery on the back of a truck.

They were not covered with soil and so had to be hilled into the ground and planted immediately saving work for the nursery and money for the 6 or 7 growers in the Association, who had to be ready to go the day they arrived! And it was worth it!

Our orchard produces lots of delicious red apples.

Harvesting the apples is great fun! The L'Arche community comes to help. The apples are:

- picked (top photo)
- sorted (bottom left photo)
- bagged (bottom right photo)
- ready for eating, sale or preserving.

They are sold through L'Arche. We use them for juice, pies, sauce, jellies, etc. Our old press makes wonderful apple juice. In the **Fall**, we **preserve** jams and jellies, with specialities like horseradish apple jelly and red pepper jelly. Yum! We both share and use these through the Winter. An old variety of apples supplies us from the cold room til February.



Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

Wild foods

This is a productive land in which the Mi'kmaq lived for over 15, 000 years, hunting, fishing and gathered their foods. (Read about them at <http://www.muiniskw.org/index.htm>)

Game, such as **fish, moose and deer**, continue to supplement the diets of the people of this island. **Berries**, such as blueberries and strawberries, grow wild, excelling in our climate.

Buffer zones

Our **cows need food** in winter too. We have cleared about 90 acres of our farm to use for making **hay** for them. But we have to look after water quality too. So we have always maintained **buffers of trees around the brooks and streams**. That way, manure doesn't leach into the local streams and pollute their water for ourselves or our neighbours.

Challenge – sourcing organic flours

As we can't grow wheat here, we have to **import** it from New Brunswick or Quebec, especially if we want **organic, entire wheat flour**. It would be really nice to see a local mill for grinding flour fresh here. Then the breads we purchase could have all of the 22 mineral and vitamins that whole flour contains.

Buying high quality (organic) bread with all its nutrients could improve nutrition greatly, as it is an important staple. Processing the grain typically removes these. Four of them are returned for the “enriched flours”, sold in grocery stores.

Sharing harvest with L’ Arche (Larch)

We are part of a **L’Arche Community**, an organization started by Jean Vanier. They come to harvest our **apples** – and use the proceeds to finance homes for people with disabilities. They love our produce too - eating good things from our farm! There are over 100 L’Arche communities around the world. If you haven’t heard of them, here is an introduction: http://www.larche.ca/en/communities/cape_breton

Buy Local - for flavour and low food miles.

By creating an appreciation for local products, the “**buy local**” movement is spreading by word of mouth. People in our area encourage each other to attend local markets and support the people who are producing foods within our local area.



A local economy exists as well, in which cash or a **barter system** can result in the exchange of honey, milk, eggs and other commodities that improve our life quality.

We, along with other farmers from our area, began the Whycocomagh Farmers Market, which now has a permanent location in the village known as the “**Farmer’s Market**”. Here you can get local blueberries, homemade baking and lots of other tasty treats. Farmers markets have also spring up in Mabou, Baddeck and Sydney. They too give local producers a venue for their products.

Fresh foods grown locally adds to the quality of life wherever you live! The flavour of locally grown food is the best!

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For more information on family farming go to:

<http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/> for more in this series of snapshots of family farms

<http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/> <http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net> for the official IYFF sites

<https://www.facebook.com/InternationalYearOfFamilyFarmingIYFF> for the facebook updates.