



FROM THEIR FARMS TO YOUR FORK



Above: B.J. Thompson from Thompson Potato Farm.

Left: Snapping a photo in one of the 20 mushroom growing rooms at Sharon Mushroom Farm.

2017 Farm to Fork Tour Doesn't Disappoint

By Blair Matthews

Hidden in our own backyard of East Gwillimbury are dozens of farms and food-production facilities that you might not have heard of before. This area is rich in potato, corn, apple, raspberry and strawberry offerings - but did you know we also have one of the country's largest mushroom farms right here in Sharon? How about a fresh turkey or duck?

This year, the Town of East Gwillimbury and the East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce hosted the 2nd Annual Farm to Fork Thanksgiving Tour on September 30. Unseasonably warm autumn weather was a bonus and the day was sunny.

The first stop for the day was at the Sharon Temple - home base for picking up your Farm to Fork tickets. The first 500 tickets sold included a free 'Experience EG' cooler bag and a kite for the kids. The bag was filled with Ontario-based recipes and a printed magazine explaining the tour. Your \$10 ticket gave you access to a map and the opportunity to purchase farm-fresh

items direct for a special price.

The Farm to Fork Tour was designed as a 50km self-guided drive through the picturesque countryside to learn about East Gwillimbury's history, the historical significance of Thanksgiving, and to purchase all the items you would need to make a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

My family wasn't hosting Thanksgiving Dinner this year, so I didn't go with the intention of shopping, but the concept is a great idea - and so close to home.

In our house, we make it a priority to buy produce directly from surrounding farms. Sometimes it's a tough concept when grocery store strawberries from California are cheaper than local berries grown just down the road. Here's the thing: when you shop local, you're getting the freshest product possible. You're also supporting local growers and in turn helping the local economy. It's a ripple effect that is a win-win for all involved.

For the 2017 tour, 7 stops were listed: Sharon Temple; Thompson



Potato Farm; AE Breeding Farm; Rose Family Farm; Brooks Farms; Sharon Mushroom Farm; King Cole Ducks (at Queensville Farm Supply); Vince's Market.

After studying the map, I opted to visit three tour stops.

King Cole Ducks (at Queensville Farm Supply)

This stop gave visitors a chance to sample freshly cooked duck breast. I'm almost ashamed to admit that before this visit, I had never tried duck. Ever. It was delicious (and no, it doesn't taste like chicken).

King Cole Ducks is owned by Bob Murby and his sister Joanne Grant and operated by third generation duck farmers.

After some samples, we were given a little gift bag filled with duck recipes.

Sharon Mushroom Farm

Next up was the Sharon Mushroom Farm. From the outside, the building didn't seem like anything too exciting. And when you first walk in the door it's dark, gloomy, damp - all the conditions necessary for growing mushrooms!

This stop, quite honestly, was my favourite part of the tour. Hidden inside these warehouse walls is one of Canada's largest mushroom producers, churning out 95,000 lbs. of product per week (upwards of 5 million pounds per year), supplying grocery chains and wholesale markets. They've been in this same location for more than 30 years!

Our tour guide, Phillip, it turns out, is a student volunteer. If you didn't know better, you'd assume he works there full-time - his knowledge of the farm and the mushroom growing process was impressive!

Mushroom growing is a 24/7 operation with con-



stant monitoring needed to support each stage of the growing process. "There are no breaks," our tour guide stresses. "No one gets Christmas or New Years off because the mushrooms don't get those days off. That means that if at 2am the boiler stops working someone has to come in and fix it."

Sharon Mushroom Farm is open to the public - you can buy a 5lb box of white mushrooms for \$10.

Thompson Potato Farm

My last stop for the day was at Thompson Potato Farm, located in the hamlet of Holt. This family-owned farm was founded in 1943 as a dairy and potato farm.

If potatoes are your thing, this is where you need to go because they don't get any fresher than here. Everything from growing, harvesting, sorting, grading, washing, and bagging gets done on the farm property.

R.J. and John Thompson are the father/son team that run the farming end of the business; B.J. is the controller for the farm.

As part of the farm tour, B.J. had lots of things for the kids to do, and a bit of education about potatoes. Many kids, she says, have no idea that potatoes grow in the ground and not on trees.

Thompson Potato Farm is open year-round to the public; potatoes and sweet corn can be purchased directly (corn, when in season). 19228 McCowan Rd.

An afternoon of touring local farms was inspiring in many ways. We're incredibly fortunate to live in such a plentiful and diverse area for agriculture. Do yourself and your family a favour - visit local farms, buy local produce, and enjoy the food on the end of your fork!

For more information about East Gwillimbury's Farm to Fork Tour, visit experienceeg.ca/farm-to-fork.

Tidbits and Treasures Canada Vintage Market

Experience the past...
A multi-vendor market with an eclectic mix of antiques, retro, vintage, collectibles, artisans and so much more!

905-252-7161

Units 2 & 3, 23721 Hwy 48, Baldwin



MARTIN DESIGNS

Susan Crema-Martin Master of Real Estate Staging

Home Staging Services
Interior Decorating
Colour Consultations

905-717-7865
susan@martindesigns.ca
www.martindesigns.ca