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Growing trend

TUESDAY, 26 JUNE 2012 02:01 KUHLL, NICK

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Nearly 100 chefs from the Calgary area and more than a dozen local organic producers met on a southern Alberta farm Monday to further establish knowledge of where food comes from.

Held at Fairwinds Farm, about 10 kilometres north of Fort Macleod, the eighth annual 'Tour of the Chefs' mini trade fair offered a chance for the two groups to formally meet each other and discuss ways to enhance awareness of the 100-mile diet and slow food movement.

Rudy Knitel, owner of Galimax Inc., a direct farm marketing company, organized the event.

"It's more and more important that people in restaurants know where their food comes from. It's as simple as that," he said.

"For them to know means the chefs need to know. This helps put a face to the product. For example, Ben (Oudshoorn of Fairwinds Farm) happens to be one of the best producers anywhere in the world for goat cheese. It's quite a thing to experience how he is doing that."

"These chefs really support the local and farm direct sales and this is quite important for the farms that market that way," said Oudshoorn, who has been selling his cheese to Calgary restaurants since 2004.

Fairwinds Farm started operations in 1998 with 20 goats. They have since become a certified organic goat dairy, now with more than 400 goats, and have their products across Alberta, including the Farmers' Market at Exhibition Park.

"I think it's very important to come out and see the local farmers and support local farmers," said Hans Sauter, executive chef at the Post Hotel in Lake Louise who was on his fifth 'Tour of the Chefs.'

"When I get these products I cannot wait to get these products again next year."

Hank Mans grows onions, garlics, shallots, alfalfa and barley with Mans Organics just north of Coaldale.

He has been in southern Alberta for 18 years and became organic in 2006.

Mans Organic is in the process of building a greenhouse to produce tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers for the Calgary market year round.

"It's a big learning curve for us, as we've never done it before," Mans said. "But it will be beneficial."

Howard Leffers of Leffers Brothers Organics, neighbouring Mans, has been involved with Galimax with his carrots and beets for the past two years.

"This is the way to get the local organic produced crops into the hands of the chefs in Calgary efficiently," he said.

"I think it's a shame when your local restaurants need to source stuff from 1,000 miles away. It makes no sense to me because nothing gets better on the road. I think consumers like to know who is growing their food. It's important."



Herald photo by Ian Martens

Nadine Ben-Rabha, right, from Kootenay Alpine Cheese Co., talks with a group as they taste product samples during a mini trade fair as part of the annual Tour of the Chefs Monday at Fairwinds Farm near Fort Macleod.



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