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La Ferme Terre Partagée:

Shared land and a shared vision

Story and photography by Janet Wallace

It's all because of the hat," says Kevin Arsenault, grinning. "That's how I met Rébeka."

We're sitting at the kitchen table in an old farmhouse in Rogersville, NB. Kevin smiles at his partner, Rébeka Frazer-Chlasson, and taps the brim of his cap and begins to tell the story of La Ferme Terre Partagée.

Kevin was attending a Beginner Farmer Conference where Rébeka was volunteering at the stand for the National Farmers Union (NFU). Rébeka was too busy to spend much time with Kevin but she gave him an NFU hat.

"She told me," Kevin takes off his hat and looks at it, "When you wear this, you can't walk with your head down.' That struck me. Later, when I was President of the Students Union at l'Université de Moncton and being interviewed on TV, I wore the hat."

Jean-Eudes Chlasson, Rébeka's father,

saw the interview and noticed the hat. Jean-Eudes was President of the NFU-NB at the time. He and Rébeka wanted to start a cooperative farming enterprise and he wrote to Kevin and invited him to visit.

Kevin had planned to buy land near Bathurst. He asked Jean-Eudes to speak at a conference he was organizing about the



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future of farming in Acadia. Also, Kevin wanted to visit to see how Jean-Budée got away.

"When it came to meeting Rebekah, there were many firsts. Everything was bringing me toward her," says Kevin.

Kevin was active in the Green Party and was asked to recruit Acadian candidates, including Rebekah, who had been considering running. (I've done... she ran for the Green in 2014.)

"We started talking on the Internet and then I came to the farm. I remember getting out of the car. She came out of the house wearing a super downed thick big hat..." Kevin grins.

"He's making this up," interrupts Rebekah, laughing.

"No, no... It's all true," protests Kevin. "We had an awkward hug, we talked and I never left."

It's a romantic story that belies the struggle behind La Ferme Terre Partagée, which means "Shared Land Farm."

"My father has struggled and escaped by all his life," says Rebekah, the sixth generation of her family to work the land. In the 1960s, Jean-Budée and his father grew Brussels sprouts, as did many neighboring farmers. Jean-Budée started working at age 13, often until midnight and before school. By 17, he was a supervisor and had saved enough money to buy a house with land.

Overall, Jean grew Brussels sprouts on over 800 acres and sold them to a co-operative, which then processed and sold them to McCain Foods. When McCain stopped buying the crop in the late 1990s, the co-op collapsed and many farmers went out of business. Rogers and I don't continue to hold a Brussels sprout festival each July. Jean-Budée, however, didn't give up. Instead, he got into hogs, as did many NB farmers. Then the hog industry collapsed.

All Kevin saw in this, "Farming didn't seem like a viable option," says Rebekah. "But we can now farm because my father struggled so much and he didn't give up."

Rebekah, Kevin and Jean-Budée are the principal forces behind the farm. Jean-Budée is a tech expert and is converting the conventional system (where each pig is pen-ed) to open housing and mice are fed on-le, along with 240 acres of grain and hay. Rebekah and Kevin focus on the certified organic U-pick strawberries and vegetable sold at farm markets and through a CSA (weekly box program). The farm also raises turkeys and chickens.

Rebekah and Kevin balance family time with farm work. Their son, Hugo, was born in January of 2018. As part of their CSA, they give out free CSAs in exchange for work. Two women help with Hugo on the farm to free up Rebekah and Kevin, and another woman cooks for the family. Each week, along with her own

CSA box, she gets a box of miscellaneous vegetables deemed too "unattractive" for customers. The woman cooks the produce and gives the couple containers of prepared meals.

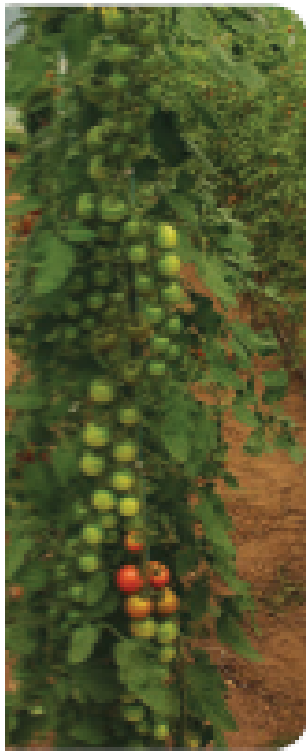
La Ferme Terre Partagée sells at farmers markets in Rogersville and Miramichi on their own, and co-operatively at Dieppe and Moncton. Five farmers make up the "Organic Corner" at these two large markets. The farm also turns staffing

U-Pick etiquette

Kevin and Rebekah both stress that most people who visit their U-pick are great, "But," they both laugh, "There are the others."

To be a great U-pick customer, they encourage the following:

1. Respect the posted opening times. "We open at 10 in the morning," says Kevin, "so the berries are dry and because we have other work to do before then." Having people come earlier disrupts their work and can harm the plants.
2. Pick at the designated spots. They tell people where to pick instead, some people pick berries on their way to the designated post. The result is that berries at the ends of rows are never picked and end up rotting.



the stall. As a result, each Euro can sell at more modest and customers are offered a greater diversity of vegetables.

For Robble, Ewin and Jean-Budes, farming is responsible for politics and community. They volunteer with the National Farmers Union to help meet its goal, "to achieve agricultural policies which will ensure dignity and security of income for Euro families while enhancing the land for future generations."

In their own community, they try to make it easier for people, particularly young Academics, to start farms.

It was at La Ridge or "Let's Devote the Ridge," named after Pleasant Ridge Road where the Euro live, was a visioning exercise which led to a land bank. In 2018, Ewin and Robble organized a public viewing of a documentary made in the 1980s about the Regenerable Bourgeois plot a boom. During the following

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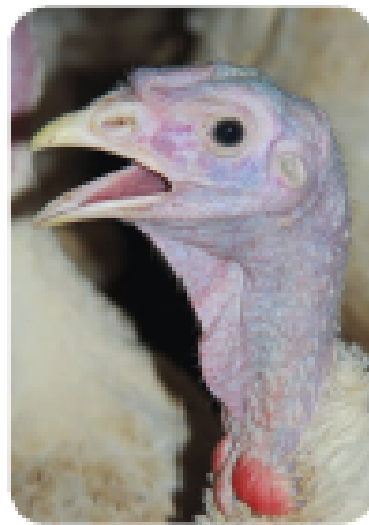
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3. Pick all the ripe berries. Don't just pick the largest berries if you do that, the small berries will end up being unpicked and will rot.
4. Don't mention the seeds. "It's an organic U-pick," says Kevin. "We have seeds. We know we have seeds. People don't need to be telling us that we should be pulling the seeds."
5. Understand the seasonal cycle. At the beginning of the season, there are some unripe berries. At the end of the season, some berries may be nothing. That's the way it goes. To avoid much of this, Kevin and Robble plant five varieties two early, two late and one mid-season. At the beginning and end of the season, the U-pickers closed and they just pick berries for markets or orders.
6. Appreciate the work. At times, they pick berries for custom orders but that's "a huge favor. We can't," explains Kevin, "guarantee that we can give people the variety they want when they want it."
7. Stick to the U-pick. Vegetable growers in the field need to be aware of what that doesn't mean: the farmers can really pick custom orders of vegetables. It's not efficient, for example, to leave the U-pickers to go to the garden and harvest one bunch of carrots. The farmers have developed an efficient harvesting system that doesn't include a single order.
8. As for taking berries, Robble says, "People think taking berries is a four-p, but that's the thing I care about the least. We have no problem with people taking berries as they pick."

WILD BLUE BERRIES



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discussion, they created a list of land available for one who wants to rent, borrow or buy.

At their own farm, the couple take on short-term opportunities. Their new business model or program is a long-term project which allows people to take on more responsibility. For example, Philippe Guéneau helps with farm chores but also runs his own initiatives, managing laying hens and making kombucha, a fermented drink.

Both Robble and Evin look at farming through an academic lens, while also getting their hands in the soil. In university, Robble learned about food sovereignty, food justice, labor rights, feminism and environmental issues, and she remains active in all these fields through farming.

Evin studied geography and rural development along with Acadian history. He wants to address the issue that 75 percent of the New Brunswick population

is Acadian but only 18 percent of New Brunswick farmers are Acadian."

He cites many reasons for the low percentage of Acadian farmers, starting with the loss of the best farmland in the Acadian Expulsion of 1766.

"After the expulsion, we were pushed to northern, rocky land, and ended up fishing, not farming," he says. Acadians also lost agricultural skills because they had to move frequently to avoid being caught up and deported along with those who had gone. Now, all the agricultural education in Atlantic Canada is in English. You have to go to Quebec to learn how to farm in French. And francophones don't have the same support network as English-speaking farmers here."

Evin and Robble address this

problem by offering occasional workshops and farm tours in French.

They celebrate Acadian culture and farming through communal meals, farm and farm tours in the *Provincial Folk Festival* (Academy Folk Fest). The third annual festival, held in July 2017, involved a weekend-long "rural university" with talks on food sovereignty and rural feminism along with workshops on practical skills such as bike repair, composting and gathering medicinal herbs.

The mix of good farm, passion and politics and a sense of fun is shared by visitors to the farm and the festival... leading to, if all goes well, a stronger Acadian farm community in New Brunswick!

