

Homestead food choices (and other lifestyle choices)

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We find that people are very interested in our approach to food and want to know more about how we make our choices (as well as other lifestyle choices). Every food choice involves thinking through the environmental and social implications associated with that food choice.

PRINCIPLES

Some of the principles guiding our choices include whether there are positive or negative implications for:

- Climate change
- Sustainability, including social justice and environmental impacts
- Small-scale versus industrial scale
- Local defined as home, community, region, and where international, invoke sustainability; fair trade and social justice
- Waste free or waste limited (i.e., packaging); compostable; burnable (wood stove)
- Health, especially carbohydrates to manage Tom's Type 1 diabetes
- Seasonal and where eaten out of season, frozen in season at home for later use
- Low on the food chain (i.e., if fish then cold-water shrimp, or clams, sometimes haddock)
- Bulk purchased where required (grains that we don't grow like chick peas, flour, seeds)
- Organic and fair trade
- Shareable for the joy of it

Not everything we eat perfectly aligns with our principles. We will buy nuts in bulk, but they are not always organic and there can be almonds in the mix which imply overuse of water. We buy some things in cans like mussels which may not be local/regional. We buy NB dairy products which can be less sustainable if one considers Baxter or Northumberland large operations. When available, however, we buy locally made butter from the farmer's market (Armada), as well as locally made luncheon meat and/or bacon. We aim to support local, small-scale farmers. But we also use coconut milk which is imported. Generally, we use fair trade and organic for imported products or what we consider luxury products like sugar, coffee, chocolate or tea. We meet that test for all the coffee and sugar we use; and mostly the case with tea and chocolate.

And yes, these foods or ingredients can be more expensive (butter \$10 pound), but not always. Buying in bulk from Speerville can save money. Not everyone can buy in bulk and pay the higher cost up front. Buying clubs can help with that where everyone's order is pooled. The meat is more expensive for those that eat meat and that can seem out of reach. Smaller portions, however, are not. Three ounces of meat is more than enough for a portion.

Not every choice can be perfect. And that is okay. IT IS THE STRIVING THAT COUNTS AND THE ONGOING PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT. I take on a new challenge as we get a grip on old challenges; we grow more of our products or make them as we gain confidence and capacity. The links below take you to some of the sources of our bulk purchases.

<https://www.villeneuvefamilyfarm.com/>

<http://www.speervilleflourmill.ca/>

<http://armadadairyproducts.com/artisan-cheese/>

INCLUSION LIST

Given the principles we try to live by, there are foods that we will eat.

- Excluded: Citrus and tropical fruits: these are imported, not sustainable in almost all cases and easily replaced, with fruit available in New Brunswick.
- Included from NB:
 - Apples
 - Blueberries
 - Raspberries
 - Strawberries
 - Black currents
 - Red currents
 - Gooseberries
 - Elderberries
 - Pears
 - Plums
 - Cranberries
 - Rhubarb
 - Grapes
 - Cherries
- We tend not to eat vegetables; greens not grown on our homestead.
 - Exceptions include:
 - Red peppers if in fall if I did not grow enough, we then buy at the Farmer's Market from Curry's Greenhouse (organic) to ensure we have enough to freeze to carry us over the winter to the next crop. I usually buy 20 or so, cut them up and pop in the freezer. We use red peppers all winter long.
 - Salad greens: there comes a point in about March where we want a salad and we are tired of grated beet and grated carrot salads! When greens come into the Farmer's Market usually from Villeneuve's we will buy them. We start our lettuce seeds in late February and in our cold frame by the end of March so can supply our own in April or so. We freeze kale and other greens, but they are not great for salads after freezing. Kale is great in soups, stir-fry but also makes a great pesto, which we use on pizza

- Any meat where we do not know its story.
 - I do not eat meat or fish if I am eating out
 - We never eat salmon given concerns about aquaculture and genetic engineering for rapid growth
 - Our preference is for meat from the property (i.e., venison) and then from small-scale, local farmers
- Processed products (for the most part)
 - I make our own ice cream (there is nothing like it and the ice cream maker has paid for itself over and over)
 - We have yet to make our own mustards or ketchup; we buy vinegar, although I mostly rely on Boates apple cider vinegar. We need acid to preserve and for some recipes vinegar is required. I rely mostly on Boates. I will buy rice vinegar (but maybe I could let that go)
 - We mostly make our own yogurt but will buy plain yogurt as starter if I run out
 - We do buy cheese (mostly from the Farmer's market) and cream cheese and sour cream from the Co-op (to make cheese cake and sugar free icing)
 - I make our own grape juice and tomato juice
 - We have a cider press but buy cider from Coburns up the road
- Wine (mostly). We make our own wine (through Wine Kitz) which means we reuse glass bottles and limit the use of imports (we occasionally splurge; wine transported by ship)
- Products like paper towel or napkins. We use cloth instead. Instead of plastic wrap we store in glass or re-usable containers. Use aluminum foil but try and limit it.

SUBSTITUTIONS

- For recipes calling for sugar:
 - Maple syrup in almost all cases except for cookies or items that need to have sugar and butter creamed together. If sugar, then it must be fair trade, organic (see golden sugar from Speerville)
 - For Tom's diabetes we replace sugar with Truvia which is a stevia (plant), based sugar substitute
- For recipes calling for citrus or tropical fruits or juices, we use:
 - Rhubarb juice for lemon juice (not always but increasingly as I just learned how to make the juice). Acid is needed to preserve food so lemon juice is important. But apparently rhubarb juice is a good replacement
 - Pumpkin for banana to make pumpkin bread instead of banana bread and of course pumpkin pie, pumpkin soup
 - Pineapple in carrot cake replaced with our home-made apple sauce
 - For recipes calling for raisins and or dates, we only use fair trade, organic purchased through Speerville
- For rice, we increasingly use:

- Oat groats, buckwheat groats. They are grown locally/regionally and saves another import

WHAT WE GROW (we aim for heritage varieties and open pollinated)

- Garlic (1,000 planted last fall for harvesting in August)
- Onions (a wide variety), including leeks and perennial green onions, chives
- Beets (at least two kinds)
- Carrots (at least three kinds)
- Brussel sprouts
- Broccoli (spring and fall crop)
- Cauliflower (spring and fall crop)
- Turnip
- Potatoes (at least four kinds)
- Squash including pumpkin, summer and winter squash (store in cold room but also cook and freeze pumpkin so we don't lose as it gets too old; we use in lots of things)
- Tatsoi, spinach, lettuces of every kind
- Bok choy
- Kale (several kinds)
- Tomatoes (many kinds)
- Hot peppers, including cayenne and jalapeno (in greenhouse)
- Sweet peppers (greenhouse)
- Eggplant (greenhouse)
- Cantaloupe (greenhouse)
- Sweet potatoes (greenhouse)
- Peas (several kinds)
- Beans (green and yellow)
- Dried beans: black beans, cranberry, kidney, navy, cannelloni
- Cucumber
- Fruit: apples, grapes, blueberries (not enough to eat all winter so we buy 10-12 boxes to freeze from Tuddenham (<http://www.tuddenhamfarms.com/>); Raspberries (or from Riverview Orchard: <https://www.facebook.com/RiverViewOrchard/?rf=866835020002274>). We also pick strawberries and cherries there as we do not yet grow enough of our own; Black currants; red currants, elderberries (just about to produce if the deer don't get them). We buy cranberries from the Farmer's market. We process and freeze so fresh fruit all winter. We have pear and plum trees that will soon start to produce
- A wide variety of flowers to attract bees; some are edible
- Wild roses for flowers but also rosehips which I dry and grind for tea
- Peppermint and mint for tea
- Herbs: i.e., thyme, oregano, lemon balm (for lemonade and flavouring), sage, basil (greenhouse), parsley, dill (use fresh and dry for winter use)
- Sugar maple for syrup (made using downed, decaying wood)

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS FOOD?

- Eat fresh as crops are coming in
- Process either in jars or freezer. Products include:
 - Stewed tomatoes
 - Tomato paste
 - Roasted tomato sauce
 - Tomato chutney
 - Tomato juice
 - Tomato soup
 - Green tomato chow chow
 - Salsa
 - Apple chutney
 - Apple-maple preserve
 - Apple sauce (using maple syrup)
 - Maple syrup (40 to 1 ratio from sap to syrup)
 - Relish (using our cucumbers (sometimes buy extra at Farmer's Market), peppers, onions, garlic).
 - Jams from our fruit, or sauce for ice cream and desserts. Less jam these days with diabetes in the house
 - Tried rhubarb marmalade last year and it was good
 - Rhubarb juice
 - Vegetable juice (especially for late season oversupply usage)
 - Grape juice
 - Vegetable stock for soups (especially great using late season oversupply)
 - Roasted red peppers
 - Vegetables are frozen: cauliflower, broccoli, kale, spinach, bok choy, nettles and chanterelles (foraging), corn (buy from Coburns as animals keep eating ours), fruit (all listed for fresh eating in cereal), peas, beans
 - In cold room: garlic, potatoes, squash, onions, carrots, beets and turnips: most last til spring/summer
 - Chickens for meat and eggs

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Need a cold room (or hole dug into the ground)
- Need freezer space (we have three: one for meat, one for vegetables and one for fruit): we aim for a year's supply of food to be on hand
- Need room to store food but that can be anywhere that is cool and dark. When I lived in a small condominium I had food stored everywhere: under the bed, in closets and on top of cupboards. I bought food from the Farmer's Market then and processed it at home.
- Need space to grow food: can be any size and accessed in any way: community garden, friend's place, ownership; parents/grandparents
- Need water: we have two wells; one for the house and one for gardening and of course hope for and rely on rain and lots and lots of mulching with straw to retain moisture and keep weeds down

- Need time to grow food and to process it. It is a lifestyle choice. I highly recommend it. There is nothing like fresh food and the ability to share what you have grown is about as happy as it gets
- Lots of fencing to try and control for deer, porcupine, racoons, skunks, groundhogs

TIME IN THE KITCHEN

- We spend a lot of time in the kitchen. In addition to processing our garden food, we:
 - Make our own bread (whole grain bread and baguettes): Tom makes all this
 - Granola (Tom makes the granola and it does include coconut which could go and nuts that are not always sustainable). Most of the products are bought through Speerville (i.e., rolled oats) or Farmer's Market (i.e., butter), or home (maple syrup)
 - Cookies; desserts and all meals are made from scratch
 - I make yogurt is made weekly; ice cream less often (as needed)
 - We prepare larger meals on the weekend to have for the week so perhaps we are making 10 meals a week. I generally make suppers. Tom makes breakfasts on the weekend. Granola for breakfasts with our fruit during the week. Lunch can be left overs. Suppers emerge from what we have in the freezer and larder.

LEARNING HOW TO DO THIS

- We use recipes we find in cookbooks of all kinds. I use books to guide the preparation of preserves. These are easy to find. For the garden I swear by Rodale's organic gardening. Never fails me. But I also just listen to what the plants need and react to that. We make our own compost (Tom is a master) and we apply to all our gardens along with straw mulch. I take care of the seedlings and planting and gardens. Tom oversees infrastructure and security. We obviously help each other a lot!
- Recipes like anything get shared and I find in books and keep using over and over. I also make it up along the way.

Pumpkin soup: (example of a mix of our own food and 'purchased')

Cook pumpkin or winter squash, cool and scoop pulp out of skins (to cook, cut the pumpkin or squash, scoop out seeds and cut into quarter size for cooking in a large pot). Save the seeds!

In a pot with a little oil or butter cook diced onion and red pepper.

Once cooked and cooled, mash pulp by hand or in the blender along with a can of coconut milk (or other "milk" you like) along with the onion and red pepper. Add some vegetable broth if you think it is too thick or a little milk/cream if you use that. Return to the stove and season with curry powder, salt, a cayenne pepper (these are easily frozen and used all winter) for a little heat. Heat gently until flavours meld together.

Seeds: separate seeds from the pulp. Wash carefully trying to remove all the pulp. Dry overnight on a tea towel (spread so a flat layer, seeds separated). Leave overnight. The next day scrape off the tea towel onto a cookie sheet. Pour a little oil in your hands and rub the seeds to cover with oil (not too much). Sprinkle salt over all the seeds. Bake in the oven at 300 degrees until golden brown (about an hour). Enjoy. Nothing better than your own seeds.

Tomato products: anyone can do this. Use a good preserving cookbook and follow the instructions so you ensure clean and sterilized products. The recipes below give you an idea of the process.

When available buy tomatoes in bulk (Farmer's Market has lots of options). Or your own of course when you have them.

Stewed tomatoes: cut tomatoes in half and put in a pot. Heat slowly until the juices release and the tomatoes start to break down. While the tomatoes are cooking you will wash and then put into the oven your canning jars at 220 degrees. You will put the tops (lids and seal) in a pot of water to heat on low temperature. And you will have a canning pot that you will add the jars to later that you will bring to a boil (so yup: oven is on for jars, and three pots on the stove). Once the tomatoes are ready (do not overcook), use a slotted spoon to scoop into heated jars (take about 20 minutes to sterilize). Use a funnel. Add juice if needed (want more tomatoes than liquid!) and fill to leave half an inch at the top of the jar. Add lemon juice and salt (teaspoon each per jar). Seal with lid and cap and put into boiling water bath (there is a rack for this). Cook for 15 minutes. Remove, cool and store.

Tomato juice: Strain to remove any tomato and put juice into a pot. Cook slowly until reduced to the thickness you want (a couple of hours at least) Add lemon juice (or rhubarb juice) and salt and put into jars and process as above. Or refrigerate for immediate use.

Tomato paste: cut tomatoes in half and cook in a pot to release juices (I use an electric fry pan for this). Remove with a slotted spoon and blend until smooth in a blender. Add lemon (or rhubarb juice) and salt and stir; pour into cookie sheets and bake at 350 degrees for a couple of hours. Keep checking: it will get a beautiful rusty colour. Don't let get too dry. Process in sterilized jars as above or refrigerate for immediate use. We use this for chili, sauces and our pizza.

Roasted puree: cut tomatoes in half and lay in a cookie tray. Salt liberally. Bake in the oven at 350 degrees until roasted (shriveled, but not too dry). Blend in the blender, add lemon (or rhubarb juice) and salt and process in jars as above. Fantastic for sauces.

Rhubarb juice: It is easy. Literally just cut fresh rhubarb. Remove leaves. Cut stalk into three or so sections or 1 to 2-inch sections. Toss in a large pot along with just enough water to cover the bottom of the pot. Cook gently until all the juices release from the rhubarb and the pulp is stringy. Strain through cheesecloth and strainer (when cool) and the juice that comes through will be pink and tasty. That is it. We add no sugar and use to drink alone or with Gin. Nothing better on a summer day.

Grape juice: just as easy. Seed grapes, toss into a pot and add water to just below the top of the grapes. Cook gently and let sit in the mash overnight. Strain through cheesecloth/strainer and let settle. Jar and refrigerate or process as per canning instructions.

HOUSEHOLD/TOILETRY CHOICES

- Only Down East dish and laundry detergent; bought in large format for refills
- Only soap and face cream from Soulcraft at the Fredericton farmers' market In a beautiful reusable jar that I bring back for refills)
- Vinegar, baking soda, and Down East soap for cleaning bathrooms, floors, etc.
- Refillable containers for storage

THE HOUSE

The house is large but heavily insulated, with efficient windows and heating (geothermal) and wood. We keep the household temperature low (never above 17 degrees) and use wood to keep the lower part of the house warm and the heating system off. This house was built under an expectation of a larger family living in it and through divorce was available for sale but did not sell. If we had sold this house and built a new one, we would use new materials and generate more consumption. The house is large, but built with FSC wood, the demands to run it are low, and our woodlot is a carbon sink.

TRANSPORTATION

We rarely fly and will never for holidays. Louise will fly short-haul flights to Ottawa, Toronto or Montreal for business/family and aims to limit these to no more than twice a year and not at all if love-visits can be by vehicle. In other locations where I have lived in the country there has been bus service and Fredericton also have no train service. Taking the train to these cities involves two days of travel and up to four hours of driving to get to and back from the train. Tom almost never travels by air except to maintain professional contacts. This means he will travel by air to a conference in 2018 and it will be the first flight he has taken in about five years. Travel generally is for work and local holidays and is by efficient vehicle, which currently is a 2003 second-hand Prius. Next purchase is electric or plug-in hybrid which will be charged from home and potentially by solar. Louise works from home as much as possible but always drives with Tom. Tom limits driving to the days he is teaching. We plan trips for shopping around school days and limit weekend travel. We own a Silverado truck which we use for the farm and for travel when conditions are hazardous. Next up if we ever must have a new truck will be a vehicle that can run on biofuel or electric.

PLASTIC AND GARBAGE

- With so much home-produced food, composting, and products we don't generate much garbage. Plastic remains an issue, but we do not have plastic containers for food because we eat in season, rarely eat out (and if we think ahead we realized recently we can bring a re-usable container to take left overs home). Growing our own food of course is huge, and if we bought vegetables we buy from the farmers' market and bring our own bags.
- Still, plastic bags do make it into the house. We just switched to carbon or bottles for milk, we make our own yogurt but there are still yogurt containers for when we need new starter. We try to re-use plastic containers for garden materials (cut bottoms off and use for collars to keep bugs off).
- Need to switch to bars for shampoo and conditioner.
- We do not use plastic wrap or paper towels (we use tea towels or a plate to cover bowls when needed)
- Straws: we have some: why? To suck air out of plastic bags for food we store in the freezer. I am thinking about how to eliminate freezer bags for freezing food.
- We try and avoid glass because we do not have glass recycling here. If we buy something in glass we do try and re-use it but we do toss when there is just too much
- I still have not started making my own ketchup and mustard, so we have plastic that comes from those. I need to move on these two products!