



“Going Whole Hog”: Fred and Ingrid de Martines of Perth Pork Products

When it comes to niche farming and marketing, there are three things you need to know: your product, your customers and your worth.

For Fred and Ingrid de Martines, their product was a no-brainer: “Pigs. It always had to be pigs.”

And the rest fell into place over time.

The two moved to Canada from the Netherlands and started what is now Perth Pork Products, located between Stratford and Sebringville, ON in 1979. Fred is a certified swine specialist who brought his European training and experience with him to raise high-quality pigs while also raising a family.

“When I came here in 1979, I couldn’t believe what these pigs looked like,” he says. “They were skinny, no meat, just a big bag of bones. So I started my own breeding program and my own herd.”

On 100 acres of land, the farm hosts rare and heritage breed pigs, wild boar, and some small crops, including grain and corn.

Their customer base comes largely from high-end restaurants, small butcher shops and direct sales.

“The key to niche marketing is a consistent product. Most people’s mistake is they start cutting corners to make it cheaper – but a cheaper product is not necessarily what customers are after. They’re looking for the same thing over and over and over again.”

That’s why the way the pigs are raised never changes, says Fred. They’re raised humanely, without any antibiotics and their feed is grown right on the farm.

Despite being approached by bigger supply chains, Fred always turns them down in favour of maintaining full control over the business. In light of growing popularity and success, Fred was told

it was time to “get bigger or get out.”

Confident in his existing business model, he knew what to do next.

“I’ll show the world that you can make a living on 100 acres.”

However, looming government regulations can be an obstacle to retaining that full control on a small family farm.

Part of Ontario’s proposed strategy to address invasive wild pigs includes phasing out import, possession, transport, propagation, buying, selling, leasing, or trading of live Eurasian wild boar and their hybrids – directly affecting processors and consumers of wild boar in Ontario like Fred and his family.

“It’s a very sad thing when the government comes in and says “no” for no good reason at all,” Fred says. With only a handful of farms raising wild boar in the province, he says that responsible farmers are not the ones causing the problem and that his farm has never had an escape that went unaccounted for.

“I’m just hoping the government stays out of it so that we can provide Canadians with wholesome food without being pushed into doing things that we don’t want.”

Fred spent years learning the ins-and-outs of not just farming, but also farm marketing – learning from chefs and studying the restaurant industry

to determine what his margins needed to be and interacting with media professionals to get his name out there. At the same time, he says he always prioritizes making time to build relationships with his customers, talking face-to-face and offering farm tours.

“You need to get that education. I couldn’t find a college that would give adequate training. Plus, if you’re running a farm yourself, and you’ve got four little kids, you sure as heck don’t have time to go to school. It’s tough, but it can be done.”

With a successful business up and running, next steps were to ensure its longevity. Fred and Ingrid’s son, Mark, and his family, took over the farming side of things four years ago.

“I’m very proud of the fact my wife and I were able to do a successful succession of our farm. We’re working on the next generation, and then (the farm) doesn’t live and die with just Fred and Ingrid.”

As far as the future of farming goes, Fred’s advice if you’re looking to break into the industry is to pick one or two things, know them well, and do them well, because you’ll never be good at everything.

“Be very focused, but at the same time, it has to be fun. You’re only going to live one life, so make sure you enjoy it.”

Coming Events

Local 340 (Waterloo/Wellington) – Local 340 is hosting their annual summer social on Saturday, August 21 from 3:00 - 6:00 p.m. at Heartwood Cidery in Erin, ON. A meal featuring ingredients from NFU member farms will be served. The summer social is always a great time to connect with other NFU farmers in the area and enjoy some friendly conversation, food and music in a beautiful setting. Free to attend and all welcome, though spaces are limited so please register in advance on their Eventbrite page or contact Local 340 president Caitlin Hall: hallcaitlin@gmail.com 519-820-1891.