



Hi! I'm Krista: Introductions from NFU-O's New Executive Director

It is hard to believe a year has passed since I started with the NFU-O. What a great year! It was like coming home. Coming home to a family of like-minded individuals who are concerned about the future- the future of our soils, waterways, ecosystems and food systems.

I count myself lucky. I grew up in rural, small-town Ontario, and knew from a young age where my food came from and how it was grown. Our family got our meat from our local farmer friends. We spent many days visiting our friends on that farm, saw the cattle grazing, and knew how our meat was raised. It was slaughtered at a local abattoir in our town, and everyone knew the butcher by name.

My grandparents, who lived in the next town over, had an urban lot sized garden, where all of our vegetables and dried beans were grown. I have so many memories as a child of walking the rows and rows of vegetables, helping to harvest peas, beans, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, chard and endive, to name a few. My favourite though was likely the perennial patch of asparagus at the back of the garden. It was a magical place at the end of the row of apple trees. Every year in late summer the house was filled with trays of beans drying in every room. Growing up with my hands in the soil was something that stayed with me.

I returned to my roots after settling down with my own family. Although our yard was not as large in Cambridge as what we were used to in a small town, we did our best to create a diverse garden system. In our small urban lot, we had a raspberry patch, apple tree, peach tree, many native and berry producing trees like elderberry, serviceberry, and sumac. We also had a tallgrass prairie patch

for pollinators in our front yard along with a number of raised beds for summer and fall eating, including potatoes, kale, chard, spinach, lettuces, beans, peas, carrots, beets, zucchini, cucumbers, garlic, a few herbs, and a small patch of strawberries. We made use of vertical gardening, permaculture techniques, companion planting and even experimented with cover crops! One year we were successful at growing corn, beans and squash in our tiny space.

We lived and gardened in this space for 18 years. We also grew community around this space. Our neighbours were always interested in what we were doing and why, and so we started a bit of a gardening revolution in our neighbourhood!

We also started a local organic buying club so that we could source anything that we could not grow, from farmers in our community. It was small and intentional, just like our gardens, but left a big impact. We sourced local, organic meats, dairy, eggs, storage vegetables, and fruit for canning and preserving. Summer and autumn were filled with canning peaches, pears, and plums, making raspberry, strawberry, and apricot jams, baking fresh fruit pies and various seasonal crisps. And, experimenting with homemade fruit roll-ups and other fun kid foods!

Three years ago, we moved from that family home. It was hard to leave our neighbourhood and our gardens. But we are putting down new roots across town, which has definitely been a work in progress. The soils are a heavy clay here, and the exposure is not quite the same. It is hotter and drier in our new yard. And sometimes, much wetter! Last year my kale and chard were devastated by earwigs in



the early days of the growing season. However, with a few natural deterrents they did make a full recovery. I was happy to have kale for fresh eating and freezing for winter soups. In my spare time I am working on building healthier soils and creating a more diverse garden oasis, and one day hope to add some backyard hens. When I am not putting in my gardens, I can be found at high school rodeos, reined cow horse events and hunter jumper shows with my teenage equestrian daughters, proudly wearing my NFU hat!

I look forward to the year ahead and working with Regional Council and members on our next five-year strategic plan, and continuing to work with members and Locals on issues that impact farms and farmers in your communities. I enjoyed working with and meeting many members this year and look forward to visiting a few members' farms this summer, as things open back up again. In the meantime, please reach out anytime: krista@nfontario.ca. Here's to a successful season for all of our NFU-O members!

Krista Long is the Executive Director of the NFU-O and an Associate member of Local 340 (Waterloo-Wellington).