



National Farmers Union – Ontario NEWSLETTER

*Strong Communities.
Sound Policies.
Sustainable Farms.*

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Cultivating healthy relationships and sustainable land stewardship

This year, Elmgrove Farm, situated on a beautiful 50-acre property near the shores of Lake Simcoe, is celebrating its 10th anniversary as a collective.

“Without the collective we’d be two lonely old people living on a farm by ourselves,” say Elmgrove owners and NFU-O members, Loes and Hans Pape. “Instead, our collective is helping make a better community.”

Modelling nature’s regenerative process, the Papes credit their desire to “give back” to Berta and Wilto Schortinghuis, who first purchased the land back in 1951 and practiced organic-method agriculture. Dutch pacifists and Holocaust rescuers during World War Two, the Schortinghuis hired a young Hans and taught the value of engaged citizenship and volunteerism. The Papes purchased the property in 2001 with Loes as lead grower and Hans, a former teacher, focusing on property infrastructure.

“Hans and Loes are special people,” says Daniel Hoffmann, a collective member. “They are exceptionally generous and kind. Income generation is not their priority. They want to be involved and supportive.”

Hoffmann, a farmer and social worker, who runs The Cutting Veg, an organic vegetable farm and CSA program, was won over by the Papes’ commitment to relationship-building. After several years at Farmstart’s McVean farm, Hoffmann purchased a nearby home and became the first to join the Elmgrove Collective in 2011.

Offering an “intentional” volunteer program, the collective soon grew to encompass four vegetable enterprises, a beehive site, a number of non-commercial garden plots, and most recently, a sheep farm run by the Papes’ son, Justin.

“As a novice farmer, it’s been an invaluable experience being part of a collective,” says Zandra Zalucky, one-time volunteer and now operator of Cultivating Opportunities. “I wasn’t initially thinking of farming as a career,” the former social worker adds, “but I fell in love with the land and felt a sense of belonging.”

Elmgrove Collective operates without any formal written contract; instead, they “proactively work on their relationships” through winter planning sessions, weekly business lunches, and almost daily coffee chats during the growing season.

“It helps that each business is financially independent,” observes Hoffmann. “Money never gets in the way.”

The Papes charge nominal rent, dependent on land use, and the collective shares some equipment, a barn space, and a produce cooler. A certain number of hours are determined annually for each member to dedicate to the farm as a whole – from infrastructure projects to weekly chore-sharing.

Mutual aid informs the collective. “We have each other’s backs,

literally,” says Zalucky recalling a spring season when everyone pitched in when she hurt her back. “There is a beauty to how we function; we are honest and care for each other’s well-being.”

Collective members create a similar sustaining environment for their volunteers and workers. The Papes once hired a couple overcoming an oxycontin addiction. Zalucky dedicates volunteer space for those struggling with mental illness. Part-time volunteers receive the collective’s time, energy, ecological knowledge, and vegetable shares. An “intentional” and “enriching experience,” volunteers obtain tailored training and the therapeutic effects of being on the land, an escape from the urban, and, this past year, reprieve from pandemic isolation.

The Elmgrove Collective (elmgroveorganic.com) insists that being good stewards of the land goes hand-in-hand with “building honest and communicative” intergenerational relationships:

“We strive to cultivate a healthy environment for all living creatures.”

You’re Invited!

Inviting all Ontario NFU members and friends to join Perth/Oxford NFU Local 341 for a discussion with Cam Goff on seed regulations and the ongoing seed regulatory modernization process. This discussion will take place ahead of our local AGM on **March 25 at 7:30 p.m.** via Zoom. This is a great opportunity to catch up on some of the NFU’s ongoing work around seed sovereignty and to gain a better understanding of how seed regulations affect your farm.

Cam operates a grain farm with his brothers near Hanley, south of Saskatoon. He has served as NFU VP (Policy) and a director on the Canadian Wheat Board, the Western Grains Research Foundation and the Saskatchewan Barley Development Commission.

The Perth/Oxford AGM will follow with reports plus the AGM business meeting. Local members are encouraged to stay for the AGM. Contact local president, Julie Fleischauer at goldenacresfarm@hotmail.com or 519-588-5290 or local secretary, Ann Slater at aslater@quadro.net or 519-349-2448, for more information.

Local 320 Bruce County – Please join us for our Annual General Meeting on March 31, 8:00 p.m. via Zoom. Contact Linda Baumberger at sonnenrainfarms@outlook.com or 519-832-2953 for more details.

A subscription to The Rural Voice is one of the benefits of being an NFU-O member