

Consumers are hungry for their food's "back story"

Food marketer says there's a growing curiosity about the origin of food being sold as well as the way it's produced

BY HELEN LAMMERS-HELPS
Ontario Farmer

Disruption is the word of the year in the food industry and that's creating gaps which enterprising farmers can fill. That's according to Jo-Ann McArthur, president and founder of Nourish Food Marketing in Toronto.

For starters, consumers' increasingly want to know where their food came from and what's in it, said McArthur. "Food fraud is huge," she said, referring to the deliberate and intentional substitution, addition, tampering, or misrepresentation of food ingredients.

McArthur said the public trusts farmers and this presents an opportunity to say "I grew this, I made this and now I'm selling this."

"Everything tastes better when it has a story."

— Jo-Ann McArthur

McArthur urges farmers to tell the stories behind their products. Farmers may not think there is anything special about what they're doing, but only 10 per cent of Canadians have ever been on a farm so for them it is impressive, she said. "Farmers tend to take that for granted."

Millennials, in particular, want to understand a product's back story, she said. "From where and how ingredients were sourced to how the animals and workers were treated."

McArthur notes the rising demand for meal kits as convenience continues to drive food buying decisions for time-strapped consumers.

Farmers who sell directly to consumers through a subscription model could include recipes for how to use the fruits and veggies in the box, or take it one step further by creating a meal kit, suggested

McArthur.

Or a farmer could work with other food producers to include a bag of homemade pasta and a jar of pesto to go with the veggies in the subscription box, she said.

Farmers can also help out time-crunched consumers by doing some of the prep work for them such as ricing the cauliflower or spiralizing the zucchini, suggested McArthur.

Food waste has been getting a lot of press, continued McArthur. To reduce food waste, some retailers are branding and celebrating imperfect produce now.

"Consumers are embracing that," she said. "Everything tastes better when it has a



Jo-Ann McArthur: Farmers may not think there is anything special about what they're doing, but only 10 per cent of Canadians have ever been on a farm so for them it is impressive.

story. It's authentic and real." Can you upcycle what was a waste product to another

use? McArthur asked. For instance, some restaurants are taking veggie scraps from farmers and making veggie broth; spent grain from beer brewing is going for animal feed, and sauerkraut waste byproducts are being marketed as "gut shots."

McArthur encourages farmers to tell these success stories.

Consumers are also hungry to share in the experience of food prep, what McArthur called "food theatre." "Bring back the curtain and let them get a peek behind the scene," she said, noting that Europe has a long history of food tourism.

"There's a growing desire

for culinary tourism here. People want to see how it all works," she said.

Other trends include an increasing role for e-commerce in food sales, growth in the demand for plant-based proteins, a continuation of the focus on food and beverages for health and wellness while also recognizing that there is still a place for the occasional indulgence.

For the complete report by Nourish Marketing on 2018 food trends, go to www.nourish.marketing/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/the2018trendreport-nourish.pdf

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