

# Hamilton Spectator

## Keeping it all local; Connecting farms and restaurants good for everyone's business

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Illustrations: Photo: John Packman, Special to the Hamilton Spectator / Jan Campbell-Luxton of de la terre caf and bakery, Fonthill. 'I've always been interested in how communities organize themselves.' ;

Jan Campbell-Luxton graduated from Trent University with a degree in international development. Volunteering with a program in South America, though, set the owner of de la terre caf and bakery on a different course -- one that focuses on building his own community of Fonthill around food.

As part of his studies, Campbell-Luxton headed to Quito, Ecuador, to help develop marketing strategies for small-scale artisanal producers, working out of a community centre in one of the city's impoverished barrios.

"One of the women who helped run their lunch program for local kids had just quit," he recalls.

As Ecuadorian men would not get involved in the kitchen, the organizers asked him to help. "I spent four phenomenal months cooking lunch for school kids. It was a wonderful experience.

"I've always been interested in how communities organize themselves to meet their needs in the absence of state support," he explains. "After university, I was not sure how to proceed. I had always cooked, and loved it. I decided to try my hand at it, but I wasn't sure I wanted to walk away from international development studies."

It took the woman he loves, he says, to point out that community needs and food are inseparable.

Between studying and teaching at Stratford Chef School, and working in high-adrenalin kitchens in France, New York, Stratford and Niagara-on-the-Lake, he realized the great potential that restaurants held to support local farmers, and in turn, the local economy.

He opened de la terre in February 2007 -- the same year that international speculators drove wheat prices through the roof, following increased world demand and drought in producer countries.

He usually sources organic Ontario-grown grains from Oak Manor Farms in Tavistock. Two years ago, though, farmers who normally supplied the mill held back some of their crops in anticipation of a further price increase, or sold to offshore buyers who could offer more money.

By late summer Campbell-Luxton had to buy from western Canada.

"For the first time in generations, farmers were looking at making money off their crops," he says, emphasizing the need for policies that protect local food sources while providing an adequate income for our farmers.

He wants to explain the frustrations and difficulties faced by farmers and food producers, make people ask a lot of questions, and think about the impact local food has on their community.

"When I opened the business, I put the bread mixer right in the front window," he says of the strategy that pulls people into the caf, just to talk.

"I really love people to ask why does food cost what it costs, why is a lot of food so cheap, and what does that mean for the viability of local farming."

As part of his commitment to building communities around local food, Campbell-Luxton helped to develop the new Niagara Local Food Co-operative, an innovative virtual market where members order online from local producers.

For more information, visit

[niagaralocalfoodcoop.ca](http://niagaralocalfoodcoop.ca).

de la terre is at 1455 Pelham St., Fonthill, 905-892-3734, or [delaterre.ca](http://delaterre.ca).

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