November 12, 2010

To: Vanessa Robicheau
    City Clerk's Office
    1st Floor, 71 Main Street West
    Hamilton, Ontario
    L8P 4Y5

Dear Vanessa Robicheau,

I am responding by e-mail to you with a submission for inclusion in the updated Animal By-Law meeting, as well as a copy of an article published in the 'View' newspaper of July 2-8, 2009, Vol. 15, No. 27. I am sending this to you as an attachment.

I would appreciate your consideration of an amendment to the Animal By-Law to adopt the same policy enjoyed in cities like Guelph, London, Vancouver, Victoria and Niagara Falls. These cities have certainly recognized the many benefits of raising urban chickens, such as eating home-raised organic eggs, lower grocery expenses, healthy eating, and going green by choosing this eco-friendly sustainable option.

Home owners of fully detached homes or those with adequate space could take advantage of this policy by raising up to a limit of six chickens. This would enable and encourage Hamiltonians to have the option to embrace a healthier lifestyle and be responsible for contributing to a 'going green' philosophy.

Thank you.
Agnes Nelson

14/11/2011
FEEL GREAT EAT LOCAL

Any day of the year, it's possible to walk into a supermarket in Canada and pick up a ripe mango. It's a strange feeling to scrape two feet of snow off your car in suburban Hamilton and then, mere minutes later, hold the product of tropical sunlight that shines over 3000 km away in the palm of your hand.

The options for adding a little local food to your life are plentiful in our neck of the woods. There are many different reasons for buying local food, from concerns about farming practices, to reducing your carbon footprint, to supporting local farmers. Phil Mount, a PhD candidate in the local and alternative foods research group at the University of Guelph says that's why he "looks at local food more as a negotiation." The possible arrangements between you and a local producer are more flexible than they are in a standard grocery store.

The Farmers' Market

Farmers' markets are fairly accessible venues for local food. Vendors set up stalls to promote their wares, often extending beyond produce into meat, dairy products, and crafts. The Hamilton Farmers' Market is located at Jackson Square and is open every Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Community Shared Agriculture

Community Shared Agriculture is an increasingly popular arrangement where customers pay a lump sum to become a member of a farm and then pick up fruits and veggies once a week all summer and fall. Customers get fresh food and, by paying up front at the beginning of the season, share in the risks of that season's crop production. Some CSAs that serve the Hamilton area include Heart's Content Farm, Singler Thyme Farm, Meaza Run Farm, and Plan B Farms.

Community Gardens

Open green space is at a premium in urban areas and a lot of residential lots aren't suited to growing veggies. Many community gardens with small plots for individuals or families have sprung up around the area to solve that dilemma. Local community gardens include the Churchill Park Community Gardens and Dundas Community Gardens.

Backyard Gardens and Chickens

People are increasingly seeing potential for urban farming in their grassy lawns and sunny balconies. Tending a backyard plot doesn't suit you, there are other options. One of the simplest ways to be local is buying a potted tomato plant, throwing it in a sunny locale, watering it regularly, and picking the delicious sun-ripened fruit. Most grocery store tomatoes are picked green and artificially brought to full ripeness, which leaves their flavor significantly lacking compared to the real thing. And if that fruit tree in your backyard seems like more trouble than it's worth, there is another option. The Hamilton Fruit Trees Project picks fruit from local backyards and trees and splits the produce between the tree's owner, food banks and local social service providers.

Hamilton does not allow backyard chickens, but the urban farming trend is growing elsewhere across Canada in cities like Guelph, London, Vancouver, Victoria and Niagara Falls. A Guelph urban chicken farmer finds that tending chickens brings many benefits -- not the least of which is fresh eggs for his table. "I can respect anything that creates something everyday. I've got a good role model to look up to," he says.

Co-opting 'Local'

Many very large, non-local food providers are discovering that the term 'local' has a certain amount of cache. Mount points out that some grocery stores have started using it as a marketing tool. This is partially due to ambiguous definitions of 'local' in different regions. "In England, if you're sourcing more than 30 miles away, they wouldn't even call it local food," says Mount. Ultimately, people are looking for ways to improve access to local food in a way that doesn't compromise its original meaning and purpose. Mount suggests that one way to scale up the availability of local food may be to attach it to institutions, such as universities and hospitals.

Now that the sun has returned to our hemisphere, take the opportunity to hold a local, fresh, still warm from the sun, straight off the vine, heirloom tomato in your hand. Briefly. And then hurry up and eat the thing because before you know it, winter will be back again.

(LAURA TOZER)