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Whatcom farm tour great for food, fun and learning

NANCY GING - FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

What a day! I'd been invited to BelleWood Acres to offer cooking demonstrations for the fourth annual Whatcom County Farm Tour Saturday, Sept. 10, and people began pouring into the orchards a half hour early.

Ten farms, two wineries and the Bellingham Farmers Market were all participating in the event organized by Sustainable Connections. I haven't heard yet how many people took advantage of the opportunity to visit farms, meet the farmers, and take part in the special activities available, but there was a steady stream at BelleWood all day.



JOAN GING | COURTESY TO THE HERALD

After nearly a year and a half of sending these articles out into the world, it was a lot of fun to have an opportunity to meet people face-to-face and talk about local Whatcom County food. Some folks were regular readers, while others were hearing the word "locavore" for the first time. All had an opportunity to taste samples of three locavore dishes I prepared for them. It was satisfying to hear exclamations over the flavors and to see people coming back to my table with friends and family in tow for more samples. As I explained to people, the flavors aren't the result of any fancy cooking skills. They are the result of starting with ultra-fresh and ripe locally grown ingredients. With quality ingredients already bursting with flavor and nutrition, very little else is required.

Efforts by the BelleWood Acres farmers Dorie and John Belisle and their staff were incredible. As John said, "It takes a level of commitment that a lot of people can't even imagine." From directing people to parking and greeting them at the entrance to answering multitudes of questions and helping them purchase apples and other products, the farm staff showed an energy and friendliness that never flagged, even in the day's hot

sun. The tractor-towed farm "train" ride was in constant motion giving people tours of the apple orchards and thrilling all the children.

Tasting tables were set up under an open-air roofed area where the breeze kept us comfortable. Besides myself, BelleWood had tables for tasting their apples with various cheeses, caramel or their specially made peanut butter. Other tables offered sparkling apple cider and more. Susy Hymas was also on hand to answer questions about food preservation. Susy teaches classes in canning and other preservation techniques, and also teaches nutrition at the culinary school at Bellingham Technical College. Other organizations, such as Sustainable Connections, had booths scattered around the premises to share information about their farm and food projects.

Surrounded by the wonderful scent of fresh apples, it was a delightful day. The Belisles were unflappable in the midst of it all, not only making sure that visitors were well cared for, but also that staff was being well supported and getting regular breaks and meals. It was an amazing feat of organization.

Since BelleWood was my host, I selected recipes that focused on their delicious apples. I also chose recipes which gave me an opportunity to talk about a particular locavore food technique, including how to make and use yogurt cheese, how to use the resulting yogurt whey to make sauerkraut at home, and how to make a simple crust for an apple tart. All three recipes I selected are available on my blog at: whatcomlocavore.com The main dish recipe is shown below. The other two recipes were an appetizer or snack (Yogurt Cheese Dip with Zestar apple slices) and a dessert (Rustic Apple Tart).

Next Saturday, Sept. 17, several local food writers, including myself, will be at a public barbecue at the Cordata location of the Community Food Co-op (Cordata and Westerly, Bellingham). We'll each be handing out samples of our recipes. Stop by, say hello and taste our local food bounty.

Whatcom County Farm Tour and the Co-op barbecue are two of the keynote events planned to celebrate Eat Local Month, which is currently underway. Throughout the rest of September, other special food events are yet to come. For more details, contact Sara Southerland at Sustainable Connections, 360-647-7093, ext. 114, or go to:

sustainableconnections.org

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/09/13/2181688/whatcom-farm-tour-great-for-food.html#ixzz1Xx8Pdfco>