

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

POSTED: Tuesday, Oct. 26, 2010

Whatcom Locavore: Brown Betty from BelleWood Acres apples

NANCY GING - FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Crisp fall morning air and bright sunshine set the tone for a delightful visit to BelleWood Acres. Accompanied by several Whatcom Locavore blog readers, we met farmer Dorie Belisle for a guided tour just as her farm store was opening.

Dorie and John Belisle own 62 acres of former dairy land near Lynden, half of which is planted in apple orchards. Their 25,000 trees produce 1.4 million pounds of fruit every year.

We rode in golf carts, which in itself was an hilarious experience since I ended up driving and had never driven one before. Carts are the primary means of getting around the 49 miles of orchard rows at BelleWood. Out in the middle of the orchard of semi-dwarf trees we stopped to see the fruit and hear the farm's story. In 1996, the Belisle's began growing Jonagold apples for the wholesale market in eastern Washington. Surprisingly, since eastern Washington is known as the center of apple production in the state, wholesalers there order Whatcom County Jonagolds. Jonagolds grown in our county stay crisper than their eastern-grown counterparts.



When the price of Jonagolds dropped over the next few years, Dorie and John began learning how to sell to the retail market. They added some varieties, began doing their

own grafting and invested in the infrastructure required, such as refrigerated storage, trucks and cider-making equipment.

They now sell their 16 varieties (soon to be 18) to visitors at their farm store as well as other locations including Haggens, the Bellingham Farmers Market, the Community Food Co-operative and all but one of the school districts in the county. They also continue to supply some apples to eastern Washington.

As Dorie explained their sophisticated drip watering system, she also talked about the need for the local community to address outdated laws about water rights. Water laws were created to settle conflicts in eastern Washington where water is in short supply and ditch irrigation was the method most often used. Here in Whatcom County, Dorie said, water is abundant and the restrictive laws often make little sense. For example, BelleWood currently uses its water right via a drip irrigation system. If they wanted to change to a sprinkler system using exactly the same amount of water, it would be illegal because their water right is bound to the drip method.

One element of their business plan has been to maintain the land in as good or better health than when they received it so that it could continue to be used as farmland in perpetuity. Toward that end, they use an integrated pest management system where groundwater is protected and minimal chemical interference is used.

Dorie and John are very proud that their farm is certified Salmon Safe. They have done a lot of enhancement work along the portion of Ten Mile Creek that crosses their property. Education is a big emphasis on the farm, and they often host groups of schoolchildren visiting to learn about sustainable farming practices.

They are also certified by the Food Alliance. The challenging requirements for this certification encompass employee relations, community participation and sustainable farming practices. While the farm has four year-round employees, during summer and harvest they support as many as 45 people.

While apples are their primary product, the Belisle's have diversified into some wonderful secondary products. They have a commercial cider production line, make apple syrup and apple cider vinegar and they produce freshly ground honey peanut butter (using peanuts from Georgia and honey from Bow). Their bakery produces turnovers, cookies and Mom's apple pie (literally -- it's a recipe from Dorie's mother). The bakery also produces a fragrance that is unimaginably wonderful! Visit the farm to see for yourself.

In the store, you can taste samples of several apple varieties, peanut butter, syrup and vinegar. Checkout the BelleWood Boskoop - "a Granny Smith with attitude," says Dorie. My favorite variety was their Honeycrisp apple. The flavor is an incredible blend of sweet and tart at the same time, and slices of Honeycrisp don't brown easily, making them perfect for use in appetizers and salads. The farm's peanut butter operation was added to go with their Honeycrisps. The combined flavors are superb. Also be sure to

taste their sample pairings of fresh apple slices and French cheeses -- BelleWood Honeycrisp and French Bleu d'Avergne are an example of terroir not to be missed!

I asked Dorie what one thing she believes most needs to be changed with regard to food production in our county, and she replied, "protect resources." She believes that federal agriculture policy is not forward looking and protection of food production resources is not seen as the matter of national security that it is. She also thinks that growth is sometimes prioritized over sensibility. "Growth should go to areas that have the necessary resources," she says. "Developing homes in areas where water will have to be imported makes no sense."

BelleWood's farm store at 231 Ten Mile Road is open every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. through the end of the year. Take some friends or the whole family for a delightful sensory experience and pick up a bag of Honeycrisps (or your apple of choice). If any are left by the time you get home (you think I'm joking?), try the Brown Betty recipe below.

Learn more about BelleWood Acres at its website: bellewoodapples.com And thanks to my blog readers who joined us for the tour!

BROWN BETTY

Ingredients

2 cups apples, thinly sliced (BelleWood Acres, Lynden)

2/3 cup honey, warmed slightly (Guilmette's Busy Bees, Bellingham)

2 cups bread crumbs (I used crumbs made from homemade Quick Brioche -- see whatcomlocavore.com for recipe)

2 tablespoons fresh mint, minced (home garden, Lummi Island)

1/3 cup water

2 tablespoons butter (Breckinridge Farm, Everson)

Hazelnuts, finely chopped (Holmquist Hazelnut Orchards, Lynden)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Put a layer of apples in buttered pie plate or baking dish. Drizzle with a little warm honey.

Add a layer of bread crumbs and sprinkle with a little mint.

Repeat until dish is filled.

Add water, top dish with small dabs of butter, and cover with foil or a lid. Bake slowly for one hour,

Sprinkle hazelnuts on top, then uncover and continue baking until top is lightly browned (about 10-15 minutes).

Serve topped with cream, or with a scoop of local ice cream.

Serves 6-8.

LOCAL FOOD RESOURCES

Appel Farms Cheese Shoppe, 6605 Northwest Road, Ferndale; open Mondays to Saturdays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.;

Artisan Wine Gallery, 2072 Granger Way, Lummi Island; open for tastings Saturdays 2-6 p.m.;

Bellewood Acres, 231 Ten Mile Road, Lynden; open daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.;

Bellingham Farmers Market, 1100 Railroad Ave., Saturdays 10 a.m.-3 p.m.;

Boxx Berry Farm, 6211 Northwest Road, Ferndale; open Mondays to Saturdays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sundays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.;

Cloud Mountain Farm Nursery, 6906 Goodwin Road, Everson;

Community Food Cooperative, 1220 N. Forest St. or 315 Westerly Road, Bellingham;

Field of Greens, Kale Street and Everson Road, Everson, Wednesdays to Fridays 2-6 p.m., Saturdays 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sundays noon-4 p.m.;

The Islander, 2106 S. Nugent Road, Lummi Island;

Joe's Gardens, 3110 Taylor Ave., Bellingham, Mondays-Fridays 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturdays 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m.;

Terra Organica, 1530 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham.

Reach NANCY GING at 758-2529 or nancy@whatcomlocavore.com. For complete weekly locavore menus, recipes, and more resources, read her blog at whatcomlocavore.com

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2010/10/26/1686203/whatcom-locavore-brown-betty-from.html#ixzz13VJLpxFI>