



Lucien's Scot Woods gets greens from nearby Sebringville.

Chew the right thing

T.O. chefs have enthusiastically joined the movement toward eating local, but it's not always simple **By STEVEN DAVEY**

FROM MULTICULTI ECLECTICISM TO the revival of comfort food, Toronto chefs have always been on the cutting edge of culinary trends. And now that even mainstream kitchens have embraced organics, eco-conscious cooks have gone one step further and become locavores. Eating local is their new mantra, Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon's 100-Mile Diet their bible.

"Most people don't understand the consequences of where the food on their plate comes from," says chef Scot Woods.

"Rather than getting things flown in from thousands of miles away that leave these big carbon footprints on the environment, we have a responsibility to support local farmers and the earth."

After replacing Greg Couillard at Habitat and doing stints as a stagiere at Kaiseki-Sakura and the Healthy Butcher, Woods has resurfaced at Lucien (36 Wellington East, at Leader Lane, 416-504-9990), the swanky boite du jour he's just opened in partnership with Mercer Street Grill and YYZ's Simon Bower. After only two weeks, it's already the hottest table in town.

The historic space (remember Graf Bobby?) has been significantly up-

dated. Heavy brocade draperies and rococo chandeliers now offset exposed brick and a massive marble-topped bar.

Woods's menu is a mix of old and new as well, and includes many dishes that use locally sourced items: house-made ramen topped with pine mushroom, roast breast of Ever-spring Farms of Ilderton's duck, and salads made from greens grown on TV chef Antony "Manic Organic" John's Soiled Reputation spread in Sebringville.

"Sure, it's easier to get local produce these days, but you really have to talk with your suppliers," says Woods. "It's not just a matter of leaving a message on a machine. That's when you get generic Californian- and South American-grown product."

"The problem with both local and organic farmers is supply, especially meat," continues Woods, who also features Berkshire pork belly from the Fieldgate organic cooperative of London-Windsor-area farms on his upscale card. "Everyone wants the prime cuts, but no one wants the leftovers."

Ed Ho's lavish Globe Bistro on the Danforth was one of the first T.O.

beaneries to include the sources of its locally supplied products on its card when it launched a year ago.

"We're very passionate about the provenance of our menu," says Bistro chef Ben Heaton. "The public demands it nowadays."

Heaton doesn't totally agree with Woods that sourcing meat poses problems. He says locally grown meat and veggies are a lot easier to find than they were only two years ago. "Even the big box stores now showcase local product," notes Heaton.

Tracking down a reliable supplier is another matter, especially for less pricey mom 'n' pop operations.

"It's getting harder to resist just buying everything from one easy source like Sysco," says Yasi Zorlutuna of Yasi's Place (299 Wallace, at Symington, 416-536-9888), referring to the U.S.-based food distributor that supplies many GTA restaurants.

"I would never, ever do that. But dealing with local farmers and wild-crafters can be a pain in the ass. They can be sketchy, inconsistent and forgetful, all the reasons that make others go to a big supplier instead."

Like Zorlutuna, Cowbell's Mark Cutrara is solving part of the problem by

growing his own organic herbs in plastic buckets on the roof of his Parkdale residence. The rising star of the downtown dining scene is so committed to the locavore cause, when I call him to comment on the foodie phenom, he's standing in a river near Bowmanville fishing for wild salmon.

"I understand the problems faced by smaller restaurants," says Cutrara. "But since I get all my beef directly from a farm near Bradford and I'm buying an entire animal, the farmer isn't stressed about getting rid of whatever's left."

Starting Monday (October 22), Cowbell hosts a series of prix fixe Farmers' Dinners in tandem with several local food growers. The first evening showcases wine from new Niagara vintner Kacaba as well as veggies from Antony John and wild boar from a neighbouring pig farmer.

Any idea what he'll be serving that night?

"I'm still working on the menu," laughs Cutrara. "But I'm sure there'll be an awful lot of pork."

For more info, go to www.cowbell-restaurant.ca.

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