

## This Month's FAB Profile: **FAB Local Flavours**

The FAB Local Flavours profile series will feature people who are part of the local food community. FAB Local Flavours is dedicated to helping consumers eat healthy, while supporting and growing the region's economy. It's a program that cultivates local livelihoods, stewards the natural environment, works for the health and wellbeing of the community, and creates a regional food cultural identity— an excellent example of sustainable community development.

### *Topsy Farms*



If you are looking for a farm that welcomes you to a calmer world, lives in harmony with the land, is based on economy, sustainability and the community, then Topsy Farms is the place to go. Take a ferry to Amherst Island to visit the sheep farm and store. Book a date for late May or early June to help feed a lamb with a bottle. Check dates for shearing in April each year. The public is welcome.



Topsy is a family farm, an affair of the heart for Sally Bowen, Ian, Jacob and Kyle Murray, Don Tubb, Christopher Kennedy and Dianne Marshall. Ian moved to the island in 1970 when his first wife taught school there and Ian was working for MTO in Kingston. They helped establish a commune and bought the farm in 1971. After working with cows for a few years, it was decided that sheep was the direction they wanted to go.

Topsy Farms believes in the old adage of most successful farms: "keep it simple; do what you can yourself." Each person has a role in the running of the operation contributing carpentry, masonry, firewood cutting, writing, gardening, web designing and accounting, as well as being a

mechanic and a vet. The farm is hard work, but also honest and fulfilling.

Meat has always been the income generator of the farm, but wool has started to pay in the last 5-6 years. The breeding stock is around 1050, including rams. Stock numbers will increase in the spring with lambing. This operation uses a pasture system to raise the sheep. Although Topsy Farms believes in gradually culling the flock so that birthing problems are minimal, Sally fosters orphan lambs and the 3rd lamb from triplets, for which the mother rarely has enough milk. They are protected from coyotes, ravens and crows by Akbash dogs from Western Turkey. Hormones are not used on these sheep, nor are chemicals used on the pastures. The Pig and Olive in Kingston exclusively carries Topsy Farms lamb. Lamb is sold locally to around 330 customers, however meat is also sold in Toronto and Ottawa. Topsy Farms credo: a happy, healthy sheep is a tasty sheep!



Topsy Farms uses old techniques of wool care and processing. The integrity of the wool is not compromised with sulphuric acid, fire retardants or bug repellents commonly used commercially. It is soft and pure and doesn't give that itchiness common to wools exposed to harsh chemicals. There are several ways to access the products from Topsy farms: The KnitTraders, Purlin' J's Mobile Yarn and Living Rooms in Kingston, Local Family Farm in Verona or the Wool Shed on Amherst Island, an on-farm store. You can purchase blankets which will become heirlooms, cloche hats designed by Sally, dryer balls, wool washing soap, gorgeous throws, comfy bedding and mattress covers, fleece inserts for footwear, thrum mitts and muffs, and sweaters in colours so earthy and rich you'd like to buy one or two, all created by local knitters.



Topsy Farms believes in supporting a strong community. Topsy Farms gives every newborn baby on the island their own lambskin. Sally produces book excerpt readings for the local radio station. Ian has produced and edited the Amherst Island's newspaper, the Beacon, for 40 years, available free online. The Lodge, B&B and the café benefit from

the visitors during special events. Food from their bountiful, organic garden is given to the Loving Spoonfuls - Sally coordinates that Island-wide. Jake is manager of the Waterside Music Festival and they support the Emerald Music Festival. Jake is also a member of the First Response Team, as were Christopher and Ian in their day. They are all integral to island life in many ways.

Topsy Farms is truly a farm that gives back. Celebrate this farm with the Frontenac Arch Biosphere.

<http://www.frontenacarchbiosphere.ca/news-and-events/news/fab-profile-topsy-farms>