

## Food bloggers come right to the source

**G**uelph – A genuine desire to learn more about where food comes from led three urban food influencers to take part in a farm tour north of Toronto earlier this month.

Registered dietitian and lifestyle blogger Noelle Martin, cookbook author and editor Fina Scropo and food blogger Megan Walter were among 35 food industry professionals, bloggers, and Instagram influencers on the annual Greater Toronto Area Farm & Food Care Ontario food influencer tour.

This year's event included stops at Sheldon Creek Dairy/Haanview Farms in Loretto and K2 Milling in Beeton, complemented by a Taste of Ontario lunch at the Gibson Centre in Alliston. This was the first tour for both Martin and Walter, whereas it was the fourth for Scropo, who has also participated in other Farm & Food Care events in recent years.

"I am always interested in learning more about our food supply and I was especially interested in learning about A2 milk and meeting the family that owns and runs Sheldon Creek Dairy," said Martin, whose Instagram account @motherhoodandmeals has over 50,000 followers.

"It's one of the events I always make time for. Why? Because it's important to me to learn about where our food comes from. It's important to learn about the people and the commitment and dedication they make EVERY DAY to feed us," wrote Scropo on her Instagram account, @thehealthyitalian, on the day of the tour.

"It's important to me to learn about the technologies that advance the nutrients, taste and production of our food, about the



**K2 Milling in Beeton was the final stop of the day for 35 food influencers, bloggers and food industry professionals on the annual Farm & Food Care farm tour.**

realities of sustainable agriculture and our responsibility to be informed and uphold certain standards... about the myths and truths about working the land, raising animals, food production and distribution," she continued.

Bonnie den Haan and her husband John have been farming since the early 1980s, joined now in the business by two daughters and a son-in-law.

In 2012, the family opened Sheldon Creek Dairy, where they turn the milk from their purebred Holstein herd into a range of products that includes minimally processed whole milk, yogurt, kefir, and 45% cream.

"It was so nice to have people in who are interested; they were enthusiastic, keen and inquisitive," said Bonnie, who hosted the tour along with daughters Emily and Marianne.

Some myths were definitely busted, she added, especially

around cow comfort, modern dairy farming and younger generations finding their roles in family farms. As well, many participants were surprised at the den Haans' office in the barn too, which helped make the point that farms are businesses and not just a lifestyle.

"I was amazed by Sheldon Creek Dairy and their dairy farming process. I had no idea that a freestall barn was an option in the dairy industry; I guess I always assumed that dairy cows were forced to be milked or that they were stuck in one spot all day," said food blogger Walter who is also an aspiring French immersion teacher. "It was really amazing to see the innovation happening at Sheldon Creek to ensure the cows were happy and healthy."

"I was fascinated to learn about the process of cows choosing when they want to be milked," said Martin of the tour

of the farm's robotic milking system. "I was in awe of the way Emily knew the cows by name and loved how the dairy cows are truly part of the family."

A recently added specialty at Sheldon Creek Dairy is A2 milk from cows that naturally produce milk with the A2 version of beta-casein rather than A1 which can be much harder for humans to digest. This makes A2 milk popular with people who have gastrointestinal sensitivities to "regular" milk.

And it was certainly a hit with tour participants, most of whom had been unaware of the product's existence – and who took full advantage of the opportunity to buy samples in the on-farm store.

Tours are nothing out of the



**BY LILIAN SCHAER**

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ordinary for the den Haans, who regularly host visitors, including a large open house two days after the food influencers visited. And as a board member with Farm & Food Care Ontario, Bonnie is keenly aware of how important it is to bring the public to farms, provide information and be transparent about what is done and why.

"We enjoy tours and we participate in a lot of them; it's exciting for us to do that. We love talking and answering questions," she said.

Some of the most common questions focus on why their cows don't go outside, when calves are taken away from their mothers and whether or not the animals are fed GMOs.

"As long as people are open to learning, we can explain in a way that people understand why things are done – it's a complicated business," she said.

This was the 16th year of the farm tour program for food influencers; a second tour this year will be held in Eastern Ontario this fall.

Farm & Food Care Ontario also hosts similar tours for culinary students and dietitians, and estimates that they've taken over 3,400 media, dietitians, culinary students and food professionals to farms and research facilities across Ontario since the tour program was started.



**Emily den Haan, wearing the white hat, explains how robotic milking systems work to a group of fascinated foodies.**



**Sheldon Creek Dairy is known for its various flavours of A2 milk, which is easier for humans to digest; it's one of only two dairies in the country selling this type of milk.**