

The Whole Pig

We are the farmer, this is our pork.

Heather Nahatchewitz, Marketing and Communications Director



What a beautiful sunny day to visit the beautiful sunny Teresa Van Raay, proprietor of The Whole Pig, located on the family farm just outside of Dashwood, Ontario. Teresa walked over from the house to show me the latest addition to her marketing endeavours - one gigantic road sign, custom built by husband Martin Van Raay, son Dean, and long term co-worker Dennis and perfect for displaying messages about offerings and specials.

“People think you have to literally buy the whole pig,” says Teresa. “This sign should be a big help in promoting all that we sell.” And it’s an impressive variety of items from pork chops to tenderloin, bacon, ground, gluten free sausage and burgers. The Porkerettes, pepperoni and jerky round out the list, along with the newest product additions, fully cooked pulled pork and 100% pork wieners.

“I wasn’t interested in farming in my younger days,” recalls Teresa. “I came from a dairy operation and had to leave every party to go home and milk. But I was already hooked when Martin said he wanted to farm together. And here we are!”

Martin and Teresa took over the home farm from his parents in 1988, starting with 180 sows and a first litter of three piglets. Now they ship 15,000 a year, roughly a load a week and are a wean to finish operation.

Teresa and Martin have four kids, two daughters living out west and their sons following in their footsteps, Phil taking the lead on the pigs, and Dean in the fields helping manage 600 acres of soy, corn, wheat, and the latest venture - garlic.

The Whole Pig retail outlet is a relatively new addition to the operation. It began in 2010 when the pork industry was going through some rough times. The Van Raay’s noticed the price was going down on the farm but not on the retail shelves.

“We needed to do something to capture some of that business,” says Teresa. “We always serve our own pork at family gatherings and events, and to us what was a basic pork chop was something other people got excited about. It was the whole concept of



Left to right: Dean Van Raay, Lee Ann Geiger, Philip Van Raay, Dennis Regier, Martin and Teresa Van Raay

Delivery Available.



understanding what we had and then sharing that with everybody.”

Teresa talks about her ‘sticky note’ business plan, which has since developed into relationships with several other OIMP members, starting with Domingos Meat Packers of Arthur. Teresa had to find a way to ensure what came back to the farm to sell at retail was their own pork and processed the way they wanted. Domingos is capable of slaughtering and tracing a smaller portion with the rest heading to Conestoga Meat Packers in Breslau. The primal cuts are shipped from Arthur to Metzger Meats in Hensall, returning back to the farm store after being custom cut, processed, and packaged.

It’s not all about the money though. “It’s getting the word out about farming. I love telling people this is what we do; this is how your pork is raised.”

Teresa goes further, “We do have a family farm, we do feed our pigs our corn, and we do put the manure on our land. A lot of times that’s all people want to know - we are good stewards of the land and that we take care of our animals - that their product is healthy.”

There’s always opportunity to share their story and Teresa takes it whenever she can fit into her schedule. “Schools and rotary clubs are fun but the time I spoke to an ESL class was most memorable. I love learning about other cultures - such a joy to listen to them and understand. I mean, how can they understand me if I don’t understand them?”



“I am busy,” she says. “But I love it. When I see an opportunity in front of me I try to take it.”

“It’s such a joy to know what we’re doing here on the farm means so much to other people. When they come back for another order or show us a picture of what they’ve cooked up we feel a part of the family. Not everybody can say that about their career.”

Even with all of these balls in the air, Teresa finds time to stop and chat. To talk to customers about best preparation methods, thoughts on new products, to hear how their purchases went over, or to answer questions. In fact, the favourite part of her job is dealing with people.



Newest product: Pulled Pork.



The Whole Pig at the One of a Kind Show.



First business plan.

“Membership with OIMP is important because networking is a big deal. It’s important to our business and OIMP provides so many opportunities to connect.” Teresa Van Raay

The Whole Pig also sets up shop at local fairs and supports all kinds of community events and groups like softball teams, church groups, with gift certificates or a fundraising program.

When not on the farm, working in the store, delivering product, or attending functions, Teresa dedicates much time to her long-standing position as Director on the Ontario Pork board and newer position as the Ontario Director on the Canadian Pork Council.

So what’s next for The Whole Pig and the Van Raay family farm?

“We’ll continue to follow our gut - we’ve come this far and things are happening, people are coming here, the vision that we had is coming true. We’ll keep at it. Definitely not stop or retire. I don’t want that.”

And given the light and energy and passion you bring to the industry...neither do we. ■

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