

Food Services Report
March 26th, 2024
Annual General Meeting, Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society

As many of you know, the Rose & Kettle Tearoom has gone through some pretty major restructuring over the last four years. During the pandemic, we were forced to adapt to a different way of service, but it has turned out to be a much-needed change for us. We've switched from a standard constant daily menu to a rotating menu. We've kept things like our cream tea and daily soup and sandwich, but have focused more on a cafe style model producing light meals, baked goods, small batch homemade ice cream and gourmet coffees, etc.

This has not only allowed us to reduce the number of staff we have on everyday, therefore reducing wages and resulting in a more profitable season, but has also given us the opportunity to spend more time on our special events, private catering and food focused experiences. So far, over the course of the last four years, we've seen steady growth in the Tearoom's profits.

Our weekly online shop continues to grow and remains successful during our off season. Our sales averages have increased each year and we are constantly seeking new ways to keep our menus interesting. Our casual approach has allowed us to take customer feedback into consideration and adapt our offerings to best suit what people enjoy ordering, while also introducing new dishes and baked goods here and there.

Culinary tourism and culinary events are some of the most popular experiences tourists and locals seek out. Last summer, we brought back FEAST, our long table dinner. Tickets sold out in about an hour, clearly showing the demand for this type of food focused experience. We had a similar result with our Holiday Afternoon Tea just before Christmas. Most of our clientele for these events have been locals so far, but it's thrilling to see so much excitement for these events.

I think a big part of this excitement comes from people who acknowledge the time and effort it takes to source and produce quality food. I grew up in a family full of farmers, as well as within the 4-H program, giving me an early appreciation for those who produce our food.

I also grew up in a family of wonderful home cooks who turned that food into delicious meals. Spending time at my grandparents usually resulted in supper of roast beef or pork chops, or ham steak and fried eggs with garden vegetable from their root cellar. My grandmother and her sisters would have "canning parties" to put up preserves and pickled vegetables and I can count on one hand the amount of times I've seen "boughten bread" at my grandparents house. I've spent many summer afternoons sitting outside snipping beans and shelling peas with my grandmother for Hodge podge. Those who know me know how I feel about Hodge podge.

So, simple food for sure, but I could look out at the back pastures and barn and see where a lot of it was raised and grown. This basic approach to local food is how I learned to love cooking. I have a huge respect for the resourceful and practical cooking that many of our parents and grandparents grew up on.

We are currently seeing a resurgence of people seeking out this type of real, high quality food. They're raising chickens in their back yard, growing small vegetable gardens, and making sourdough bread.

The tearoom is in a unique position as part of the museum to be able to build on this demand and provide not only the kind of food, but the type of experience people are looking for.

Since we've made changes, we have seen our clientele change rather drastically to include more young people, as well as families who make it part of their routine to bring their kids to the Farm weekly. They almost always grab a snack or a meal from the Tearoom. This is something we didn't often see before, as many parents have told us they were nervous about bringing their children into the Tearoom with all the fine china around. Working to make the tearoom a more welcoming and approachable space has had a huge benefit.

Part of my personal excitement surrounding the Tearoom is being able to decide a daily menu on somewhat of a whim depending on what's going to be ready to pick in the garden. I love taking inspiration from the seasons and being able to put my own twist on the traditional Nova Scotian dishes I grew up eating, or keeping them simple (like Hodge podge).

I also appreciate being able to chat with our gardeners to discuss what to plant for the year, and finding uses for vegetables, herbs and fruits we may have an abundance of. This allows us to reduce food waste in the kitchen and excess produce can be placed in our garden stand for community members.

Farms and food go hand in hand, and keeping that connection is very important. It's wonderful to be able to work closely with Janice, Heather, and Magali to plan and execute food events in a way that may not have been possible before.

I think it's fantastic that we have a team who won't think twice about helping out where needed. Janice and Heather have helped serve or have done dishes during busy events, and Magali and I have never hesitated to feed chickens or bring calves in. To me, that's the way a small operation like the Farm needs to run in order to thrive.

As well, a huge thank you to Magali for her constant support in the Tearoom. I'm so looking forward to seeing what the upcoming season will bring.

Respectfully submitted,

Paige Antonick