



Sharon Creek Farm

The landscape at Sharon Creek Farm has changed dramatically in the ten years since entrepreneur, Sally Shearman, purchased the neglected six-acre lot. Farmed as part of a 130-acre homestead in the 1800s, its sloping banks near Roger's Reservoir hadn't been tended for decades.

Since then, Sally has invested countless hours to learn how to successfully develop and implement her vision of an organic farm designed around the principles of permaculture. "My focus was always permaculture – to create a closed loop, where everything on the farm has many purposes, and supports each other," said Sally.

Her previous career path was varied but did not include farming; rather advertising, teaching, French and German translation services, pottery and landscape design. Thankfully in the farm's formative years, her parents were able to offer some guidance, having farmed in the Southeast of England where her family emigrated from when she was a teenager. She's also developed relationships with likeminded businesses from as far away as Quebec and is a member of groups such as York Farm Fresh the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario.

Sharon Creek Farm is bustling with a small flock of sheep, chickens, ducks, geese, goats and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. As one example of permaculture, the ducks are an integral part of the closed loop system. As a rare breed, she sells the young to other producers, sells eggs and meat to consumers and the ducks also help by providing organic manure and bug control as they move through the fruit orchard. With nutrient rich soil as a foundation, owner Sally Shearman confirms that her healthy plants can more naturally resist disease and insect pressure.

The landscape inside of the farm has improved dramatically since 2009, and the environment in the local communities of Newmarket and Holland Marsh in York Region has also evolved. Sally was

What is Permaculture?

Permaculture is design principle based on a sustainable, whole systems thinking which ultimately cares for the earth as well as people. The principle supports regenerative agriculture and community resilience.

aware of the impending urban encroachment when she purchased Sharon Creek Farm, and now credits her close proximity to consumer markets as one of the key elements to her business's viability. "There are huge markets here and great interest in the Greater Toronto Area for local food," she said. Her products are sold to local restaurants and chefs, as well as at an organic farmer's market in Richmond Hill. Customers also buy direct from the farm from February to November each year.

Many first-time customers find it hard to believe that there is a thriving and active farm so close to their suburban homes. Sally sees this as a special opportunity for her community, worth preserving from development. "This is the future of farming around urban centres," she said. "We need to preserve areas of land so we can have small farms within urban areas, so people can stay connected to where their food comes from and have access to healthy, local food."

With just one full time staff member and one part time seasonal worker to help, there aren't plans to provide formal school trips or grow the business as an agri-tainment centre, though she does see her position as educational. Over the years, several entrepreneurs and those interested in learning more about farming and sustainability have either worked or volunteered on the farm.

Ten years in, much of the infrastructure such as fencing, security and tree planting is now in place. Ever enthusiastic, there are plans to further develop the farm shop area, which is expected to open in time for the 2020 season.

Learn more about Sharon Creek Farm online at sharoncreekfarm.ca or visit during open hours at 18805 2nd Concession, East Gwillimbury, Ontario L9N 0G6.

York Region Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy

York Region is committed to supporting our vibrant and thriving agriculture and agri-food sector. This work is being guided by the Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy – an action plan that was endorsed by York Regional Council in 2017.

With five strategic goal areas accompanied by 45 recommended actions, the strategy is an ambitious framework designed to achieve results and demonstrates York Region's commitment to the sector.

To learn more about York Region's agriculture and agri-food sector, visit york.ca/agrifood

