

Learning on farm bike tour in Maple Ridge

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On Sunday, Kim Lauzon of the Golden Ears Community Co-op and several members of our HUB committee took a group of people on our second Bike to Farms tour in Maple Ridge.

It was our biggest ride yet.

We led a group of 39 cyclists, young and old, along a 15-kilometre route of quiet roads and pathways, and visited Brookfield Farm, Lorea McCready's vegetable garden and Red Barn Plants and Produce along the way.

The purpose was not only to get people out on their bikes, but also to learn more about our local farms and to support the Golden Ears Community Co-op.

From Matt and Deanna Laity, we heard about some of the history of the Laity family, who built Brookfield Farm in 1879 and have been running it since.

For me, the cozy old-fashioned cow barn brought back fond memories of the adventures I had as a young kid at similar farms in Holland in the '60s, when I accompanied my veterinarian dad on his farm visits during school holidays. You may think I'm weird, but for the first time in my life I started thinking about cows' personalities while listening to Matt talking about his cows. How many of us do that when we buy a jug of milk or piece of packaged beef from the grocery store?

Supermom-gardener Lorea McCready is a firm believer in healthy, homegrown food. Her vegetarian family eats what's grown around the house all year through. Apart from stocking several freezers to last through the winter, she manages to sell some of her beautiful, tasty fresh produce straight from her garden to local markets and restaurants, as well. She also loves to pass on her inspiration, seeds, plants and produce, whenever available, to anyone who's interested in growing and eating healthy, organic food, albeit the growing part probably at a more modest scale than Lorea does herself.

There was more to learn at Red Barn. Ken Knechtel showed us around the farm while Elke fed us delicious sweet little grapes, as well as some lovely juicy peaches, both from their farm in the Okanagan. The more I learn about our local farmers and what they do, the more I appreciate them. It takes a lot of hard work, and it should make us all think about how little we're really willing to pay for high quality, locally grown food, while we're profiting from

cheap labour elsewhere, where labour standards and wages are much lower than in Canada.

Before we can go on a ride like this, whether we have 10 or 100 cyclists, we have to apply for several permits, in this case three. More than a dozen people – at City of Maple Ridge, parks and leisure, RCMP, fire hall, and, in this case, Metro Vancouver parks – have to give their permission and approve the route. HUB needs to provide insurance coverage for the cities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows and others.

I wish the whole process could be simplified. Mind you, everyone I dealt with was very helpful.

Me, I'd much rather be spending my unpaid time working in my vegetable garden than deal with the unnecessary bureaucracy.

The worst thing of all is that lawyers and the insurance company want us to warn participants, in the waivers they have to sign, that riding on the road can be dangerous and result in injury or death – and as organizers we have to emphasize that to any participating youngsters.

Why, on the other hand, is nobody giving kids similar warnings when they start driving a car?

They should be told that they are operating murderous vehicles weighing several tons, which can and do cause lots of destruction on our roads on a daily basis.

Fortunately, the only feedback I got after the ride had nothing to do with the dangers that people had been warned of. It was all positive: "We really enjoyed it and found the farms very interesting"; "What a great experience."

Another participant said, "The ride was a blast. I had fun."

And a third told me: "I enjoyed all visits, especially the Brookfield Farm. I learned a great deal about farm life and also bought some really tasty grapes from the Red Barn."

What? No traumatic experiences?

Well, perhaps we'll do it again next year.

We'll just copy all the e-mails, permits, posters, and everything else, so it'll be a breeze.

Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows chapter of HUB.

