

OPEN KITCHEN: REDEFINED

by MHAIRRI WOODHALL

GAZING BEYOND THE MAGNIFICENT FEAST BEFORE ME, I TAKE A MOMENT WITH THE VIEW.

The late summer evening sun warms my back and shines a soft golden hue across the field of knee high wheat that dances in the gentle breeze. Our long table stretches across the edge of a grass hill, angled to take advantage of the rolling farmland and sweeping big sky views.

Edmonton based restaurant RGE RD. The restaurant's owner Chef Blair Lebsack and Tam share a common goal – creating a food conscious community that connects people back to the farm. Their mission is a movement that's gaining momentum. This evening's dinner is part of Alberta Open

this special place. There are more than 50 adventure activities sprinkled throughout Prairie Gardens' 35 acres. I sensed immediately that there was never a master plan. Rather, the farm grew organically over time, each element dreamed up with a sense of childlike wonder and imagination.



OPEN FARM DAYS

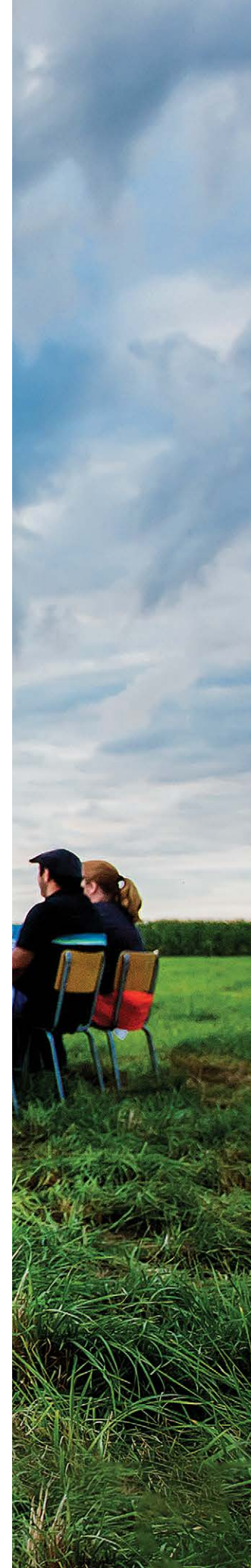
There are 65 of us dining in this picturesque farmer's field in Bon Accord. It's the largest Field to Fork Dinner that Prairie Gardens & Adventure Farm owner and Director of Fun, Tam Andersen, has ever hosted. The dinner series is held in partnership with the award winning

Farm Days – a province wide two-day open house inviting the community out to participating farms and ranches.

A DREAM REALIZED

I arrived early to explore. Wandering through the grounds I could feel the love that built

It's a paradise for children here as they have the run of the farm. Sprinting, jumping, squealing with joy, and of course getting a little muddy, is all part of the experience. There are wagon rides, a petting farm, puppet shows, duck races, an ice cream shop and a market garden u-pick. That's just the beginning. In the fall a corn mega





Welcome to our backyard.



maze, pumpkin patch and giant cannon that shoots Halloween's favourite squash are added to the mix. Visitors return year after year just to see the next chapter in the story of this fairy-tale farm.

than 10,000 kids on the importance of knowing where our food comes from.

A TRUE OPEN KITCHEN

I'm fortunate to sit beside Tam at the long table dinner. Her knowledge is especially helpful during the first course. Served family style, The Edible Farm is



a salad that uses everything from Prairie Gardens' harvest that week. Trying to guess the various ingredients is a magnificent conversation starter that truly connects farm to fork. Having eaten at RGE RD before, I'm thrilled to finally experience one of Chef Blair's famed open range dinners. His team works the open kitchen with enthusiasm to

produce a most creative menu. My favourite thus far is the tempura style ricotta-stuffed pumpkin blossom with grilled zucchini and tomato salad. The succotash made from baby corn, peppers and legumes served with free range pork is a close second.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

I soon learn that Tam is a farmer's daughter married to a farmer's son. Their children have grown up at Prairie Gardens – helping with everything from planting and harvesting, to sales and event planning. The pastoral venue for tonight's dinner is care of her husband Terry, a commercial wheat and canola farmer. Terry's 86-year-old father Niels, who supplied the 40-day dry aged beef for the fourth course, still rides a bicycle around his working farm. Throughout our meal I hear stories about the many heartaches and triumphs of farming. Tam tells me that farming is in her blood. I believe her. But what impresses me most is her commitment to sharing her vast knowledge with the community. A calling that she is most suited for, as her passion for the farm – and life – is infectious.

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COMMUNITY SUPPORTED FARMING

Appetizers for the six-course meal were served at the farm's campfire pavilion – a rustic gazebo just steps from Chef Blair's wood burning oven. After snacking on beet antipasto, cauliflower polenta and roasted broccoli with marigold butter, we toured the garden to see where the ingredients were grown. Tam's farm includes a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program with 50 families. The concept of a CSA garden is to share in both the risk and bounty of the harvest. After enrolling at the beginning of the growing season, participants receive a fresh produce basket every month throughout summer, as well as one at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Yet another way Tam is connecting farm to families.

In September and October, Prairie Gardens also hosts school field trips. Every year Tam harnesses her passion for farming to educate and inspire more

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Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park: UNESCO World Heritage Site and the world's first peace park.

