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King's Beretta Farms – A small business success story

By Julia Galt

For many Beretta Farms customers, visiting the brand's home base on 800 acres of rich, rolling hillside in the heart of rural King is like stepping into another world.

Whether it's at one of the brand's educational "Farm Days," or during their bi-weekly farmers' market, visitors are able to see exactly the kind of free-range fields their food is raised on. It's this level of transparency that has led to the brand's considerable success throughout their near 30 years in business.

Today, Beretta Farms' products can be found in more than 150 restaurants, grocery stores, and delis across Canada and the Midwestern United States. In addition to their King City ranch, they've amassed a network of over 40 family farms that raise their animals throughout Canada.

But back in 1992, their inaugural year of farming, the idea of one day running a proteins powerhouse was far from the minds of founders Cynthia and Mike Beretta.

"We weren't trying to go into business, we weren't trying to start a brand," reminisced Cynthia Beretta. "It was more, let's farm, and see what happens."

Cynthia and Mike were 21 and 22 years old, newly married, when they first began their journey into farming. For Cynthia, then working at CIBC, and Mike, a professional soccer player, the radical change of career was a personal one. They knew they wanted to raise a family on a farm, and have the opportunity to work alongside their children as they grew. Purchasing a farm in Wingham, Huron County, it took

several years of trial and error before the inexperienced family truly found their footing.

"We read a lot of books – there was no internet, no YouTube back then," said Beretta. "And we asked a lot of questions. We were very fortunate to be surrounded by an organic farming community, and to have great neighbours who helped us along the way."

The first animals to join the farm were two small pigs, raised ethically and organically before their meat was sold to friends and family. This success led the Berettas to expand their pig herd, adding cattle and chickens into the mix. Raising their animals ethically, without antibiotics, steroids, or added hormones, was a natural path for the Berettas, and one they continue today.

"Raising our animals this way was a conscious and unconscious decision for us," Beretta said. "I think it makes for a far healthier, cleaner, and sustainable product. But because we didn't come from a farming background, we also had no preconceived idea of what farming should be like. The thought of adding antibiotics or hormones to our animals was a foreign concept to us."

Mastering the rigors of early farmstead life was no easy feat for the family. There was weather and difficulties working the land to contend with, not to mention the added pressure of raising their three young children, Thomas, Marcus, and Lieschen. But living the rural lifestyle, a long-time goal of Mike and Cynthia's, was more than enough reward for their efforts.

"Having our children raised on a farm, and working alongside us from the moment they could walk, instilled in them a work ethic that we couldn't



Photo by Marcus Beretta

have taught otherwise," Beretta said, on the greatest benefit their switch to farming brought. "They learned along with us."

The family's move to King City came in 1999, having already expanded their business beyond the Wingham homestead. The opening of the Beretta Butcher Shop in Brussels in 1997 marked exponential growth for Beretta Farms as a business, and, for the first time, the family was selling meat to people other than friends and family. Realizing that having land close to a large urban area would only increase their success, the Berettas moved to their present-day 15th Sideroad farm.

Beretta Farms had already had their products featured on the menus of local restaurants when they lived in Wingham, but their move to King sparked a new phase of growth. By 2006, Beretta products were being sold in big-name retailers including Whole Foods and Loblaws, with their meat used in restaurants like Chipotle Mexican Grill. To adjust to growing demand, the family began working with other organic farmers across Canada, and diversified their products from raw beef, chicken, and pork to hot dogs, hamburgers, frozen meals, and baked goods. They currently operate a catering company, Beretta Kitchen, and Heritage Angus Beef, a sister brand that exports meat to EU, UAE, and Asian markets.

Despite their success, Mike and Cynthia continue to set their eyes on the horizon. Along with growing the brand further, they're also looking forward to their children taking a more active role in the family business. Currently, daughter Lieschen works as the farm's ranch manager, while son Thomas works with their online e-commerce platform. Though Marcus isn't a full-time employee like his siblings, he's responsible for much of the website's photography and has been delivering online orders in the wake of COVID-19. The business, Cynthia asserts, retains the same family-centric values it's had since its conception.

Beretta Farms is just as transparent as ever. The family frequently opens up their King City ranch to the public, with the goal of educating visitors on where their food comes from. Visitors can feed pigs, collect eggs, and meet the Berettas during one of their family Farm Days, or get a culinary lesson in meat – and a delicious meal – during their Carnivore Club Dinner Series. With bi-weekly markets, and programs that include barn dances, cooking lessons, and summer camps, the farm is always buzzing with energy.

"It's all about community, education, and sharing," Beretta said. "By sharing everything that matters to us, we hope that these things then matter to our clients."

For more, visit <https://berettafarms.com>

Stores open for curbside pickup, delivery

More people are returning to work across the province as the Ontario government allows retail stores with a street entrance to offer curbside pickup and delivery. Over the weekend, garden centres, nurseries, hardware stores and safety supply stores began offering in-store purchasing. All retailers should follow available safety guidelines in order to protect staff, consumers and the general public during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In addition, provincial parks and conservation reserves opened this week, with limited access. To start, recreational activities will be restricted to walking, hiking, biking and birdwatching. People will be able to access all parks and conservation reserves for free until the end of the month.

"The reopening of more businesses and provincial parks is a clear sign that we are making progress in our battle against COVID-19," said Premier Doug Ford. "We are getting more people back to work when safe to do so and laying the groundwork for a full economic recovery. At the same time, we are moving carefully and cautiously to ensure we don't put people at risk and remain ready to respond to any potential outbreaks or surges in cases."

"As we see more positive signs on the public health front, the fight for business-owners, for workers and for families continues," said Minister Phillips. "Our Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee is actively working towards the next important step, which is reopening our province so we can get the people of Ontario back on the job safely. We are all going to have to work together to get our economy growing again. And now more than ever, the Ontario spirit will ensure we're successful in these next steps."

Easing restrictions on retail stores is aligned with the first phase of the government's framework, which allows for businesses that can operate safely to do so. The Framework also includes guiding principles for the safe, gradual reopening of businesses, services and public spaces, and sets out the criteria Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and health experts are using to advise the government on adjusting or loosening public health measures.

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