

PERTH COUNTY KITCHENS

Source: [The Stratford Beacon Herald](#)

Perth County office cooks up ideas for producers, public

Posted By LAURA CUDWORTH , STAFF REPORTER

The Perth County economic development department is launching a pilot program with the hope of connecting the public with local food.

One event in the works is a "Meat Up," which would bring meat producers together to meet the public and offer samples of their products.

"Then people will feel comfortable approaching them at the farm gate. We want to be that bridge," said Laurie Knechtel, co-ordinator of Perth County Kitchens.

The economic development department also hopes to involve local chefs and other food professionals in some of the interactive programming. "So far the reception has been really great," Knechtel said.

The focus will be on cooking, baking, preserving, growing and sourcing local food. Classes could include artisanal bread making, goat's and sheep's milk cheeses, fall planting for a 2011 harvest, the region's honey varieties and the importance of bees, and gluten-free baking.

"Classes will be led by food (and) industry professionals and will incorporate kitchen safety and safe food handling practices," Knechtel said.

Children will also get a chance to don an apron. Children's classes will include ice cream- and sorbet-making, basic bread making, a grow-your-own-food gardening session and simple sauces. Knechtel added the fee will be nominal to ensure widespread access to the programs.

Farmers are invited to use the kitchens to create "value-added" items to sell at markets or at the farm gate.

"This program greatly reduces the risk and cost that an artisan or producer would have to assume to create market-ready products that comply with food safety regulations," said economic development co-ordinator Bernia Wheaton.

Perth County Kitchens will give the public an opportunity to rent community kitchen space for various projects, for example, pickling and preserving parties.

A kitchen could also be rented for baking or for large family meals. The facilities will be in community centres in Milverton and Mitchell.

The trial program starts this month and runs until mid- October. For more information, e-mail kitchens@perthcounty.ca or call Laurie Knechtel at 519-271-0528 or go to www.perthcounty.ca/page/kitchen.