

Over 200 people participated in Bowmanville's first REKO

By Bev Caswell

The cold, damp weather and looming storm clouds didn't deter Clarington residents as they gathered in the parking lot of the Garnet B. Rickard Recreation Complex on Thursday, May 14 to participate in the area's very first REKO.

This "fair consumption" food distribution concept from Finland connects customers directly with food producers. REKO networks have been taking hold across Europe and are making their debut in North America, starting last summer in Co-bourg.

Thanks to the efforts of Michael Longarini of Second Season Farm in Newcastle who spent countless hours volunteering his organizational skills, Bowmanville held its first REKO, which took place during a one-hour time frame beginning at 5:45 p.m.

With physical distancing protocols in place, the event ran like

clockwork as customers lined up with appropriate spacings and were directed to the various farmers with whom they'd placed their orders via Facebook.

Picture vendors at the ready, with tables set up and bins filled to overflowing with the many packages to distribute to the line-up of customers eagerly awaiting their opportunity to meet the producers and collect their goods. From the look of the smiling faces on both sides of the table, Bowmanville's first REKO, with its aim to create a direct relationship between customers and small-scale producers, was a huge success.

After nine weeks of social distancing, it seems as though the REKO has fulfilled a need, allowing for something different than outings to the grocery store. As Valerie Morrison from Oshawa said, "It's like being at a flea market. It's exciting, it's wonderful." She then added,



Bowmanville's first REKO, organized by Michael Longarini of Second Season Farm.

"It's my first REKO and basically one of the first times I've been out of the house." Lynne Barnes from Courtice chimes in, "Yes, the first time out besides going to a grocery store."

Melissa Rypstra from Courtice was one of the first customers to arrive. "I love it," she said. "It's got really good potential. Looking at the lineup of customers stretching across the parking lot, she added, "And a lot of people came out."

Sherri Davis is another customer who thinks REKO is a great idea. She is pleased with the willows she's purchased from Second Season Farm. "Aren't they gorgeous?" she says. "I just redecorated during COVID, so they're going to look awesome in my newly painted living room." As an avid attendee of craft markets, she sees the REKO concept as filling a gap. "I think we're going to miss craft markets all this year, so the REKO fulfills some of that need," she says.

Part of the appeal for vendors is that there is no cost for producers who take part and every penny of each sale ends up in their pocket. Karen Yellowlees, of Yellowlees family farm, is delighted with the way the first market is going and is optimistic

about the future of this venture. "Our orders have been really great, and I think we're anticipating that there's going to be a steady demand," she says.

Janice Finn of the Morning Sunshine Soap Company was surprised with the number of orders she received. Her product is so popular that in-person shopping wasn't necessary. "Normally, you'd think people would want to smell the soap," she says, "but people have leapt in and placed a lot of orders and it's going well so far."

Gary Zuters of Tallboots Farm talks about the benefit of customers pre-ordering. "It's easier for us actually because we aren't bringing stuff that we end up taking back home," he says.

Merridy Senior of Puddleduck Farm outside of Pontypool notes that "the change with everything means looking at your business differently." She enjoys the aspect of being able to sell everything up front.

Joanna Bastas of Bhudda Belly Bakery in Newcastle adds, "I think this is great. It's great that everyone can place orders ahead of time, and it's just pick up so you're not at a loss for any product because everyone is coming to pick up their items. And it's great to get people supporting

local."

Steve Lawrence of Dare2Dream Farm said, "I think it's a great concept." He reiterates what many of the customers and farmers are saying, "It's a great opportunity for promoting local." Jeremy Clarke of Bhudda Belly Bakery reflects on the success of the area's first REKO. He grins and offers a suggestion, "First of all, it needs to be warmer."

People are definitely showing their support for local producers. The principle of REKO is fair consumption and developing a relationship between customers and food producers. On that level it seems as though the first event was a stellar success. As Sherri Davis, one of the customers, sums it up, "The farmers are still working, and I'm buying local."

The Bowmanville REKO will be a weekly event each Thursday evening from 5:45pm to 6:45 pm in the Garnet B. Rickard Recreation Centre's parking lot. Customers pre-order from the various vendors via Facebook.

Any vendors interested in participating can visit the REKO Canada website or send Longarini a private message via Facebook.



Steve Lawrence of Dare2Dream Farm, Kendal