

WINCHENDON - Local farmers recently saw a demonstration of farm-to-table goodness that made even kale palatable to the fussiest of eaters.

Roots Natural Food of Leominster came to Charlie's Red House Farm in Winchendon where farmer Kees Overgaag took a group for a tour around the farm, where they discussed methods of growing food organically and talked about what fresh and local means to everyone's health.

Overgaag explained that many farmers can stamp their product as organically grown, but sometimes, even if grown organically, chemicals for preservation are sprayed on vegetables being shipped. He delivers his vegetables freshly picked, adding nothing to give them a longer shelf life.

Marie Urguhart of Winchendon loves Roots Natural Foods, and came to visit the farm on Wednesday, July 11, to learn about organic food that is produced so close to her own home.

Urguhart learned how Overgaag grows bio-dynamically, planting two or three vegetables together to make the best use of the soil, and how he amends the soil to make sure the plants have nutrients needed to thrive. She said even dogs have a job of keeping the deer at bay along with the woodchucks and other pests.

Kevin Williams, a chef at Roots, showed the group the difference between the taste of fresh-picked kale, tough and difficult to chew, and kale after it has been massaged.

They learned that massaging kale helps break down the fibrous leaves to make it more tender and flavorful. He spoke of the vitamins found in raw vegetables as he built a salad using kale and other freshly picked vegetables.

People who attended the demonstration ate quiche made from fresh farm eggs, and fresh vegetables with special dressing created by Williams. They watched the many ducks and farm animals wander through the gardens and fruit trees and sat back to enjoy a beautiful day.

Overgaag said he provided all the ingredients, and Williams created the dishes to serve for the afternoon event. He asked how everyone dining liked the fresh-dug potatoes, which were delivered with no salt or butter to the table. The diners all gave a thumbs-up.

Overgaag said he delivers two days a week to Roots, and gets to hang around the natural food store. He is hoping to have a farm-to-table event yearly.

Farming is time-consuming, and sometimes takes many hands. Overgaag has a few friends who help him during the growing season, and they eat what is harvested. For some, it has been a first introduction to farm-fresh vegetables and they look forward to lunches.

Overgaag, who is usually stoic, said with a quick grin and tongue-in-cheek, that even though many of his friends suggested he should massage the kale before it is turned into a daily lunch for them, he has determined he is too busy growing the food to massage the kale, and if they would like it massaged so it tastes better, they can feel welcome to massage it themselves.