

Kitchener-Waterloo

Local food organization supports children, adults with disabilities: Andrew Coppolino

Our Farm provides organic produce to the KW Habilitation community

[Andrew Coppolino](#) · CBC News ·

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Our Farm located on Erbsville Road occupies an eight-acre plot of land that is chock-full of leafy greens as well as longer term crops like broccoli,

cauliflower, cabbage, peas, beans, tomatoes and more. (Andrew Coppolino/CBC)

With sporadic drizzle falling, it's a cool and windy late-June morning as head farmer and gardener Laura Bredschneider instructs her interns on the technique for harvesting Our Farm's organically-grown green and purple kohlrabi.

"Snip the kohlrabi at the base, like this, and then remove any yellow leaves," she says holding up a perfect specimen of the cabbage and broccoli relative.

Also known as German turnip, the kohlrabi represents some of the first vegetables harvested at the farm operated by [KW Habilitation](#), a non-profit organization providing services and support to children with special needs, and to youth and adults with developmental disabilities.

The eight-acre plot of land on Erbsville Road between Bamberg and Heidelberg, about 20 minutes from Uptown Waterloo, is chock full of leafy greens, flowers for pollinators and trellis systems for climbing plants like beans and micro-mesh netting to keep out insects.

The rural kitchen garden accounts for one third of the farm's acreage, according to

Bredschneider.



Kohlrabi was one of the first vegetables to be planted and harvested at Our Farm. This purple kohlrabi, a relative of cabbage and broccoli, is ready to be picked by carefully snipping at the base and removing yellow leaves. (Andrew Coppolino/CBC)

"At this location we do some of the longer-term crops. Things like broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, peas, beans, tomatoes, some lettuces, winter squash, zucchini, peppers, eggplant and some rhubarb and other perennial crops like asparagus," she says.

Virtually anything you find in your supermarket produce section is growing here as well as some vegetables that are less familiar. I watch as interns John Bannister and Shireen Ibraheem — who arrived in Canada from Syria only 10 months ago — pick garlic scapes, which is the stem and flower of the hardneck garlic that grows beneath the ground and will be harvested later in the

summer.

Adjacent to the defined, cultivated garden beds are rough and scraggly raspberry and saskatoon berry bushes; further afield are the apple trees and roughly 1,800 trees which Our Farm has planted.

They also have bees and a visiting beekeeper to take care of them, a bird habitat and a one-kilometre walking trail under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Depending on the season and availability, you can purchase Our Farm jams and salsas through the website.



Our Farm also plants flowers, like these ones found at the end of a row of tomatoes, for our pollinator friends and employs a beekeeper to take care of all the bees. (Andrew Coppolino/CBC)

Our Farm, along with their 8,000 sq. ft. sister urban garden on University Avenue, supports the KW Habilitation communities by growing produce accompanied by a vision that seeks to

connect people to the land, food and each other through sustainable agriculture.

The garden started in 2011, and by 2013 the first vegetables were planted. That all came about at the grassroots level, according to Our Farm coordinator Jenny Weickert.

"Leanne Baer, a local community individual, drove by the property and wondered why we weren't growing food there. She got the whole thing started and formed a group of volunteers," says Weickert.

Fast forward to today and Weickert estimates that the organic produce harvested from Our Farm each year is worth between \$15,000 to \$17,500. As a point of comparison, according to Canada's Food Price Report for 2023, a family of four will spend roughly \$16,200 on food this year.



Our Farm coordinator Jenny Weickert says all the

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produce grown on the farm, like this beautiful Green German turnip, goes to K-W Habilitation. (Andrew Coppolino/CBC)

"All of the produce that we grow here goes to the people in the KW Hab community. People that live in our inclusive-living homes or independent homes and apartments," she says.

Surplus produce is processed and frozen, and community members can pick it up later in the winter, while some goes to other non-profit organizations like House of Friendship, St. John's Kitchen and A Better Tent City.

Our Farm interns Ibraheem and Bannister, and University Avenue garden interns Evie Myer and Cooper Moore, are paid through the federal Canada Summer Jobs program.

While Bredschneider, whose experience includes working on farms in British Columbia, says "farming is farming" when you get right down to it, she's quick to point out some important differences that 'Our Farm' addresses.

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Interns John Bannister (left) and Shireen Ibraheem (right) pick garlic scapes, the stem and flower of the hardneck garlic that grows beneath the ground. (Andrew Coppolino/CBC)

"I think the demographic we're working with is the big thing here and the food insecurity and cost of living that people are facing at the current moment. That's a big positive for this program and why I was excited to jump on board," she says.

Our Farm is an unfunded program, adds Weickert, so the wider community's support is crucial.

"All of our funding comes from donations, such as those from 100 Women Who Care Waterloo Region. We're always looking for volunteers, and we love corporate days of giving where a large company group of 25 will come in and give three or four hours of work which would take us several weeks to do."

While everyone has been forced to deal with

skyrocketing prices in this economy — especially for precious healthy food — the members of the KW Habilitation communities, who are on Ontario disability-support pensions, face an even more tenuous situation when it comes to the cost of living, Weickert says.

That's a key factor, she notes, adding that ultimately everyone enjoys eating fresh vegetables that are nutritious and delicious.

"We all know that with the rising cost of food, vegetables are very expensive, so our communities having fresh organic produce available to them for about six months of the year is fantastic. They just love it."

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