



## BETTY AND JOHN CHAMBERS

"We're moving to the County, and we'll live off the land ...won't our lives be grand..." The Frere Brothers song pokes fun at city people who go country, but Betty Chambers doesn't mind. She came to the County to farm, and she's loving it.

"I'm in my third year farming, and my third career in life," she laughs. Three years is not a long time, but this educator/stockbroker/organic grower has a successful market garden in Northport, some restaurant customers and a farmer's determination. Soft-spoken but tough, she's also the driving force behind Picton's new farmers market that is causing a pleasant stir downtown.

Betty is part of the Farmers Faces project that aims to provide "one-stop shopping" for fresh County produce to chefs and restaurants, but she and many others want an agricultural community to have its own farmers market, too. The last market had struggled a bit, so Betty tried a new approach. Picton was the obvious choice, and she and neighbour, John Della Bosca, scouted locations then spoke to Colin Windsor, owner of the Armory Mall on Main Street, about putting stalls in front of his building. Colin was enthusiastic, and although the planning department preferred the idea of a market in the designated "market square," they agreed to a trial run on Main Street.

"We want to get a buzz going," says John. "Get some dynamic going downtown, raise awareness of the market and get more growers involved, bring in the jugglers..." Jugglers? With or without them, the market is attracting attention with its fresh vegetables, flowers and fruit, croissants and pies and herbal products - even jerk chicken sizzling in a blackened fry pan.

"We've got good vendors and we want to attract more, and keep them," says John. "People need consistency to come back each week, they need to know who's going to be there." He feels that once people get used to and look forward to the market, it could maybe move ... if it had to.

Betty knows it's a challenge to keep it going. "The bigger established farms don't have the time," she says. "But farmers markets are traditionally outlets for people like us, with small amounts or specialty stuff." Growers who might have headed off to Belleville market and those who already have roadside stands might want to check out the Picton Saturday market. Fees are minimal, the existing group is cheerful and supportive, and the idea "If you build it, they will come..." seems to be working with both County folk and visitors stopping to buy.

So what does Farmer Betty grow? Salad greens, vegetables, herbs and soft fruits, even edible flowers. "I focus on unusual things for restaurants, like French fillet beans and baby leeks," she says, betraying her city sensibilities. And why not? Our tastes are growing more sophisticated. Betty and John work as a tag team growing similar crops, and John admits his wife Geri does most of the real work. "I'm more strategy and finance," he says, though the fresh baked croissants at the market are his. Last week he had his niece's son Matt from England digging potatoes and working the stall with him. So, they're enlisting the family's help on the farm, working hard outside all day and providing delicious, fresh County produce to buyers. Sound like farmers, don't they?