

# Local harvests will be put to good use

BETHANN G. MERKLE

We often think of Quebec's harvest bounty as coming from the farmlands outside the city but even here within the city, this year's harvest has been abundant. Not everyone is in a position to take advantage of the abundance. However, thanks to creative partnerships, Moisson Québec fills the gaps in the food chain for an extraordinary number of households in the greater Quebec City area.

Now that mid-summer water restrictions have been relaxed, local gardeners can reflect on the hot summer with delight. Tomatoes, peppers, beans and other heat-loving vegetables are having a bumper year. Evidence of this bountiful harvest is obvious at local farmers' markets and community gardens scattered throughout the city.

Readers may be surprised to learn that some of Quebec City's favourite parks are also key food sources for Moisson Québec. Working with the motto "More than a food chain, a human/humane chain," this organization has been partnering with the Commission de la Capitale nationale du Québec (CCNQ)

for years. Donations from the Parc du Bois-du-Coulonge apple orchard (see full article in this issue) and the recently revitalized vegetable garden at Domaine Catarauqui have provided thousands of pounds of organic, locally-grown produce this year.

These past weeks, the harvest has been in full swing. On Thursday, September 13, representatives from the CCNQ, Moisson Québec and the Urbainculteurs met at Domaine Catarauqui to celebrate a fruitful partnership. This year is the first time in four decades that produce has been harvested from the soil at Domaine Catarauqui. According to the Urbainculteurs, who are responsible for the design, installation, and maintenance of the vegetable garden, the 1,300 square-metre lot will likely yield well over 1,000 pounds of produce.

This harvest, combined with the anticipated 6,500-lb. yield of apples from the Parc du Bois-du-Coulonge, will be distributed throughout the Quebec City area and beyond. According to their statistics, Moisson Québec provides various food aid services to over 30,000 people every month. With a reach from "Portneuf to Sainte-Anne-



Frédéric Smith (CCNQ historian), Marie Eisenmann (co-founder of the Urbainculteurs co-founder), and Hélène Vézina (Moisson Québec provisions coordinator) are delighted to have the opportunity to share the Domaine Catarauqui harvest with the community.

de-Beaupré, from Lévis to Lotbinière," this is an enormous task, and an equally significant responsibility.

Thanks to this successful

first season, this garden at the Domaine will continue to "provide access to fresh, local, organic produce; help teach the public about

urban gardening; and lead to a reduction in urban heat islands." According to all three organizations, the Domaine Catarauqui harvest

contributes to one of Moisson Québec's primary objectives — "Providing the support necessary to meet a vital need: feeding oneself."

## Local youth play key role in annual "Friendship Harvest"

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On the last weekend of summer, September 15 and 16, over 200 volunteers from several community organizations met at the Parc du Bois-de-Coulonge to pick apples. According to Gaston Nadeau, coordinator of the Maison des Jeunes de Sillery (MJS), the *Récolte de l'Amitié* has been taking place annually for the past eighteen years.

Prior to the creation of this community effort, the fruit had sat unpicked and largely ignored for nearly thirty years. In 1994, Robert d'Entremont, the estate's last resident and final horticulturist, contacted Nadeau at MJS with the idea that they could join forces to gather the apples. Nadeau told the *QCT*, "When d'Entremont first approached me to discuss it, he estimated a few trees and maybe 500 pounds of apples.

We figured it would be a great project for the young people we work with." However, upon their arrival that first year, Nadeau recalled, "we saw the size of the orchard and knew it would be a much bigger job than expected. In fact, it took a few adults and around 30 youth five full weekends to pick all the fruit. We did it by hand. We had no trucks, no ladders, and not even enough boxes."

Reminiscing, Nadeau posed a rhetorical question. "What could we do with so many apples? We certainly couldn't eat them all ourselves!" The question was presented to the young people, who initially suggested selling the apples. But as the fruit grows in a public park, they eventually concluded that was not quite fair. Ultimately, it was decided to donate the whole crop to Moisson Québec. As explained in the Local

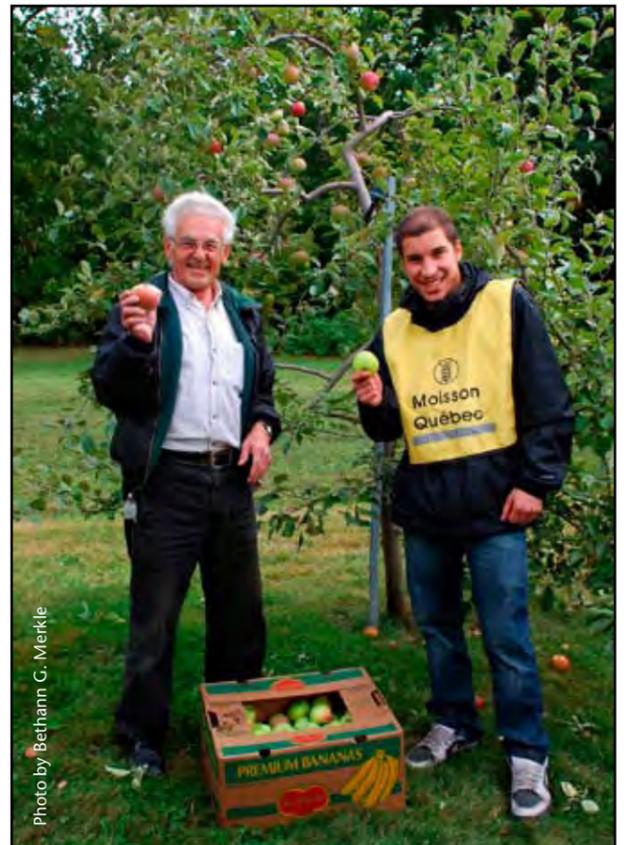
Harvests article on in this issue, Moisson Québec is a community food organization that works to improve food security (i.e., the availability of adequate food supplies) in the Quebec City region. Since their first experience, Nadeau and the youth involved have become more efficient. They stress that this project helps 'fill the gap' - at an average of 2900 kilos a year, they have donated over 56,000 kilograms of apples since that first harvest.

The harvest has also become a way to encourage other local groups and organizations to contribute to the effort. Each year, a handful of groups are invited to spend half a day assisting with the harvest. This year, students from Collège Jésus-Marie de Sillery and the police technology program at Campus Notre-Dame-de-Foy participated. They were joined by volunteers from

the White Cross and families associated with the Quebec region's branch of the Federation of Adoptive Parents.

One volunteer apple picker, Jeanette Fortier, told the *QCT*, "My daughter invited me today. I am used to volunteering, but I had never heard of this project before. I did not even know about the apple orchard before this." While Fortier has picked apples on Île d'Orléans, she feels this is a particularly meaningful harvest.

Nadeau concurs. "The participation of other organizations provides city dwellers with a hands-on opportunity to harvest local food grown within the city limits. Most importantly, the young people and other volunteers participate in sharing the city's surplus with people who may not otherwise have access to it."



Volunteers Marius Venable and Colin Sparks, from the Maison des Jeunes de Sillery, were all smiles as they picked apples from one of the orchard's younger trees.



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