

B.C. grocery store sells only locally sourced and produced foods

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The 100-Mile Diet originated in British Columbia and now, in what may be another first in the province, or perhaps even in Canada for that matter, is a grocery store selling only locally grown or produced foods.

Brambles Market in Courtenay, B.C., in the agricultural region of Comox Valley on Vancouver Island, opened early this year and the couple who launched it are still reeling over its success.

"After only six months we have a loyal customer base, so much so that they bring their families and friends who in turn are shopping here," says Angeline Street, 36. She and her husband James, 34 and a chef by profession, decided to source local foods from the island, the Lower Mainland along with a few products from the Okanagan.

"Rather than just going the 100-mile radius we went to B.C. as it gives us a lot more options," says Angeline, who has worked in retail for several years.

"So our mandate is if it is grown in B.C. and processed in the province we'll consider sourcing it," she explains.

The pair gave the market's unique name Brambles for the wild blackberries which grow in abundance in the valley.

The 185-square-metre market, which previously was a car dealership, a health-food store and latterly an ink refill cartridge outlet, is not, "laid out like a traditional grocery store," Street says.

"I wanted to get away from people aimlessly walking up and down the aisle picking up the same items week after week. This store is designed so you have to pay attention. You have to look around and discover the new things we bring in every week."

Street says unlike mainstream grocery stores, "we had to make up our own rules creating our own distribution and shipping as we draw up a product list."

And because they don't deal with a lot of middlemen on many products "we are cheaper than most of the grocery stores in town."

Street says the market sells locally caught fresh wild fish, organic meat and poultry and breads made by bakers in the area.

Getting the whole premise of eating local year-round and grasping the significance still eludes many consumers, she says.

"When you are standing in front of the canned tuna aisle in your supermarket and have a can of B.C. tuna in one hand and a tin of one from Thailand in the other, you really need to choose the B.C. tuna."

"This is because eventually all the canneries that are left -- and there aren't very many (there used to be hundreds on the West Coast) -- that cannery is going to go deeper and deeper in the hole. Eventually it is going to shut down and there is nowhere for the fishermen to sell their catches."

"Then we will all stand around saying, 'Why can't we get fresh fish around here any more?'"

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