

## Good things grow ...in Clarington

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By [Melissa Mancini](#)

HAMPTON -- More than two decades ago, the Pingles sold produce from the family picnic table on the side of road.

Then, they sold their wares from a wagon. Eventually they constructed a building to house their produce.

Since then, to say the farm has expanded would be an understatement. The farm sells flowers from the greenhouse in the summer. There are pick-your-own strawberry, raspberry, pumpkin and apple seasons.

Tomatoes, sweet corn, cucumbers and rhubarb are available seasonally. The family runs a market and bakery. There's a corn maze that changes each year for the kids, and the adult, too.

This year, the Pingle's marketing prowess garnered them the Outstanding Farm Marketer of the Year Award handed out by the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association. It also landed them on the cover of Harvest Ontario 2009, a listing of Ontario farms, farmers' markets, fairs and other popular summer destinations, available at Home Hardware stores across the province.

Despite all these marketing efforts, there are still many locals who haven't been out to the farm to do some fresh grocery shopping or who know what's growing in the Pingle's backyard.

"We still get a lot of people saying: 'Oh, you grew this? Right from here?'," Colleen Pingle said.

This happens despite the fact the farm has been in the community for years.

The Pingle family is the second owner of the farm. When Walter Pingle's dad bought the farm in 1947 it cost \$16,000. Back then, the Pingles were dairy farmers. When Walter Pingle took over the farm, he switched to a cash-crop operation and that's when the roadside sales of fresh fruit and veggies began.

Since then the family has worked hard to keep up with what customers want and need, Ms. Pingle said.

"We always take the opportunity to talk to people and find out what their needs are," she said.

The recent accolades for the farm were handed out at a yearly conference at Brock University. Locally, the organization came to give the award to the farm on Tuesday, with local politicians adding their praise for the family-run operation. Guests were treated to the smell of bacon and farm-grown asparagus on the barbecue and a tractor ride through the Pingle's fields.

It's not an easy business to be successful in. The Pingles face the same challenges farmers have for years, Ms. Pingle said.

"The weather dictates to us quite a bit," she said.

There are other challenges as well. Employees have to be able to multi-task because their job descriptions change hourly. Pest management is also an issue; the Pingles have to work diligently to keep bugs out of their pumpkin patch or risk losing a crop.

But the Pingles have never backed down from a challenge, even if it was an unexpected one, Mr. Pingle said. When bees built a hive in one of the farm's trees, the family didn't try to get rid of it. Instead they became beekeepers, despite having no experience making honey before.

On top of the array of services the farm offers and the marketing the family does to get their name out there, they also



Jason Liebrechts / Metroland

COURTICE -- Walter and Colleen Pingle, of Pingle's Farm Market, recently won the Ontario Outstanding Farm Marketer Award. The farm is one of countless local growers who offer a variety of farm fresh products. June 16, 2009

open their doors to area schools for tours. For Mr. Pingle, leading the kids through the farm is one of the most gratifying parts of the job.

"Everyone actually listens to me," he said laughing.

Website: [www.pinglesfarmmarket.com](http://www.pinglesfarmmarket.com)