

Experience the region's bounty and learn about the burgeoning farm-to-table movement from the people who understand it best: the farmers, ranchers and growers themselves.

Farm Fresh

Take a self-guided Circle Farm Tour to see some of the Fraser Valley's most delightful (and delicious!) destinations

+ WORDS BY SHERI RADFORD

This summer, if you're looking for a family-friendly staycation that's also healthy and affordable, look no further than a Circle Farm Tour.

These self-guided tours let you explore the Fraser Valley's agri-tourism destinations at your own pace, whether that means over a few hours or a few days. Experience the region's bounty and learn about the burgeoning farm-to-table movement from the people who understand it best: the farmers, ranchers and growers themselves.

Ready to begin? Download a brochure from circlefarmtour.com and start exploring. The Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows tour includes 12 scrumptious stops you can visit in any order.

At **Dr. Bee's Honeyland Canada** (drbee.ca), the stars of the show are the powerful pollinators that are key to life on this planet. According to general manager Richard Lin, the farm is focused on "the importance of taking care of bees and the environment as a whole."

Crops as varied as soybeans, citrus fruits, almonds, sunflowers and alfalfa all require pollination, so the aim at Dr. Bee's is to educate visitors about the crucial role of bees and the dangers facing them, such as colony collapse.

As Lin puts it, Dr. Bee's is all about "starting young, teaching little kids, then spreading that message to the older audience."

In the store, live bees are on display as well as an empty beehive. Try your hand at using centrifugal force to extract honey. Pick up sweet products such as honey, bee pollen, bee propolis, soap bars and lip balms. To learn even more, schedule a guided tour complete with an informative presentation (ideal for school groups), or return on July 13 and 14 for the Bees and Blueberries Festival. This free fest is abuzz with activities such as live music, pony rides, pie-eating contests, guided tours and a live-bee beard on Lin himself.

"It's part of the job description," he says with a laugh.

Meanwhile, the family-run **Leghorn Ranch** (vancouverhorsebackriding.com) has 20 horses in summertime. Janet Shanahan and her partner run the picturesque place, which features an abundance of flowers and stunning views of the nearby mountains.

According to Shanahan, "When people come, they don't want to leave."



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Fortunately, it's easy to return. Novices and experienced riders alike can book a trail ride to explore the area's backcountry with a guide. Kids can sign up for summer camp. And birthday parties include pony or horse rides along with crafts such as horseshoe decorating.

For a culinary adventure/experience, **Hopcott Meats** is a family farm with a butcher shop, deli, grocery store and bistro.

Jenn Hopcott-Foxley, the operations manager, says the business prides itself on its non-GMO, steroid-free, dry-aged beef sourced from just three ranches in BC. "We can tell you when that animal was born and on which ranch," she says, adding that this ensures both traceability and consistent quality of the meat.

But Hopcott Meats sells more than just beef: "We're all about local, and supporting local farmers and producers. We also have chicken, pork and lamb."

The farm uses two wood-chip smokers to cure bacon, pepperoni and ham in-house. In the store, you can buy an array of local groceries, from produce and sauces to ice cream and baked goods. Enjoy a leisurely meal in the bistro, peruse the farm's corn fields and cranberry bogs, or grab a snack and wander around the nearby dykes.

All year round, **Amsterdam Garden Centre** sells locally grown and organic plants, gardening supplies and gifts. The staff can help with planning everything from a container to full backyard gardens. To develop your green thumb even more, sign up for a workshop.

Golden Ears Cheesecrafters is a farm store run by two sisters. It stocks fresh butter and — of course — cheese: Brie, cheddar, feta, Gouda and many more. Watch cheese being made, enjoy breakfast or lunch in the Country Kitchen, or feast on a gourmet dinner while the chef demonstrates how to prepare each of the courses.

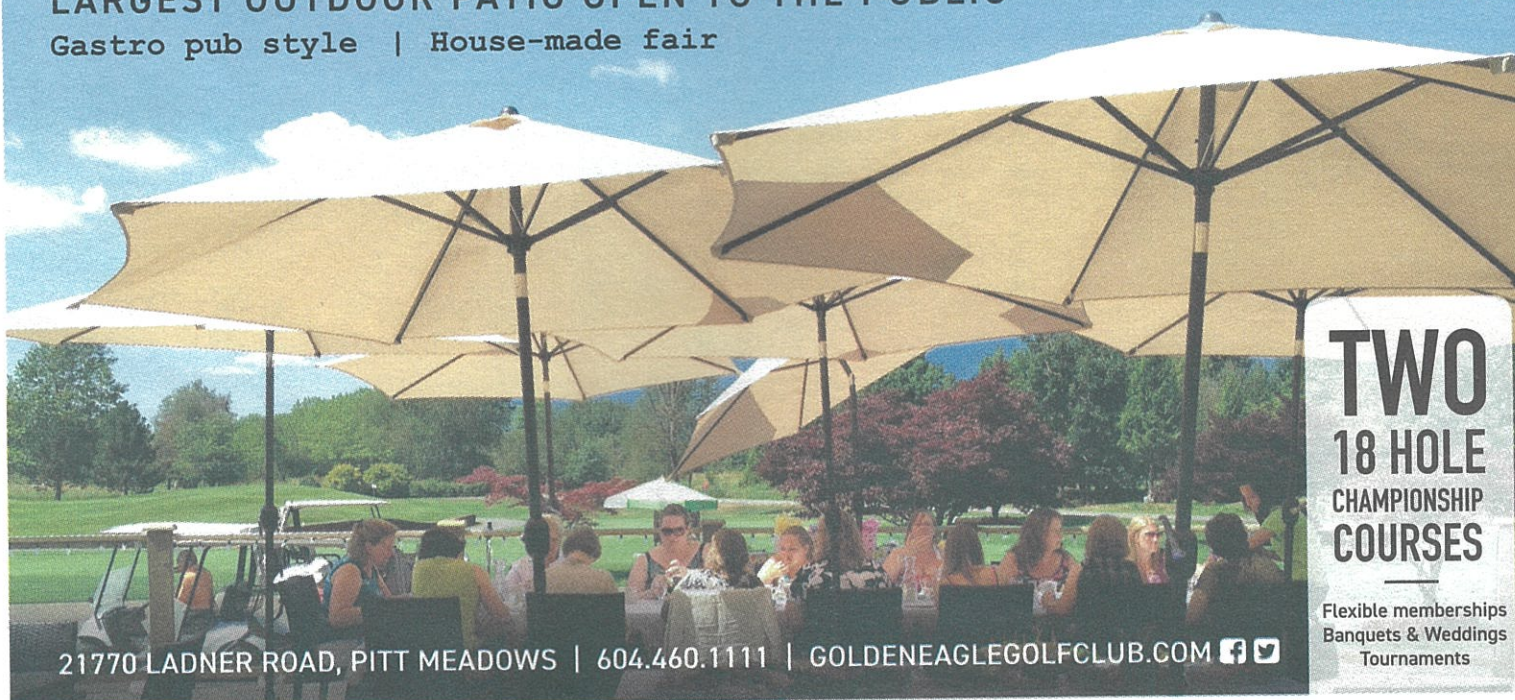


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Golden Meadows Honey Farm sells everything from beekeepers' needs to honey, honey pots, bee-themed jewellery and more. **Grow & Gather** has garden plants, hanging baskets, pond supplies, bee-keeping equipment, and the perfect spot for relaxing, right by the koi pond.

Big Feast Bistro and **Humble Roots Cafe & Deli** both showcase local ingredients on their menus, which change regularly to reflect what's in season. **Kingfishers Waterfront Bar & Grill** boasts a stunning location right on the bank of the Fraser River, plus weekend brunch, live music and a stellar selection of local libations.

The family-owned **Blue Heron Fruit Winery** uses its own cranberries and blueberries in its table wines and dessert wines, which are available for purchase alongside seasonal produce, gourmet food, glassware and gift baskets

On Saturday mornings all summer long, **Haney Farmers Market** overflows with a bounty of local food and handmade products.

If your interest (not to mention your appetite) has been piqued, then also explore the Fraser Valley's four other Circle Farm Tours: Abbotsford, Agassiz/Harrison Mills, Chilliwack and Langley. Your taste buds will thank you. 💛



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