

Business is Good

Ruth Klahsen & the Monforte Brand

When cheese-maker Ruth Klahsen stood before the panel of millionaire entrepreneurs in the first season of CBC's *Dragon's Den*, she was undaunted. She was facing down the kind of investors who would never consider putting their money into expanding the production of hand-wrought food. They're looking for a hefty return in profits, not exactly what a pre-eminent Ontario artisan can provide.

Still, Klahsen made her spirited case and lost, but she has proven that it's possible to get your market to take notice of you, to recognize the quality of your product, to buy regularly from you, to rave about you and to feature your brand by name on menus or on specialty retail displays.

The proof is on the palate. Last summer, *Toronto Life* food writer Chris Nutall-Smith wrote, "Ruth Klahsen's Monforte Dairy makes the best cheeses in Ontario. Full stop."

The trajectory of Klahsen's success began with quality. She pays a premium for the sheep's milk from naturally reared stock. Knowing what demanding chefs want, having been one herself, she created cheeses that gave her a reputation—which gave her a market.

Hitting nearly \$1 million in sales in 2008, Monforte made big plans: a new sustainable, micro-production dairy in the Community Shared Agriculture model.

Klahsen will sell "futures" in cheese and an expanded product line paying out delicious dividends.

www.monfordedairy.com

Ruth Klahsen



Photo: Terry Manzo

Good Help is Good to Find

Local food has the government's attention in a big way. The Ontario Market Investment Fund is serving up help as an expression of the province's commitment to local food. The fund is offering support to encourage strategic alliances among individuals, farmers, businesses, processors,

retailers and foodservice, as well as community, agricultural and industry organizations. Marketing, market research and promotion are also on the radar, because getting the word out is key. For more information and an application, go to: www.ontario.ca/omif.



Bright Ideas Chefs Work the Fields

Future farmers get a leg up from the 16 small organic Ontario farms belonging to CRAFT, the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. Everdale is one of these farms. Everdale usually takes on six farmer interns, but last year they offered the first-ever internship for a chef-farmer. Stratford Chef School graduate Mark Seiling (kneeling in front) has just finished his stint. He's waiting to hear from a friend who is in the market for a farm. Once the deal is done, Seiling will work the farm with her, putting cooking on hiatus—for now.

www.everdale.org www.craftontario.ca