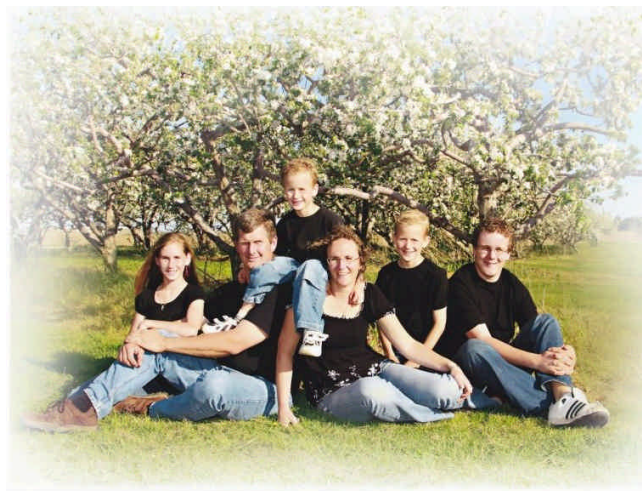


John and Maxine Zekveld Zekveld's Garden Market, Wyoming

John and Maxine started their farming story when they got married in 1994 and moved onto a rented farm where John was raising veal, and doing some cash cropping. After spending a couple of year working on a dairy farm, they dreamed of raising a family on a family farm. In the year 2000 a Fruit and Vegetable Farm in Wyoming became available so they took a large leap of faith and started a new business.

One of their first realizations was that nearby Pick Your Own competitors did not allow children on their farms. They quickly grabbed onto this marketing strategy and welcomed kids on class trips, did in-school speaking arrangements and started working with a local nutrition program.



One of their biggest challenges was their lack of farming knowledge. They relied heavily on the expertise of the existing farm workers, and took time to attend seminars, conventions and meetings. They also network with other farmers and share ideas and currently have their names down for the Canadian Total Excellence in Agriculture Management (C-TEAM) program offered by the George Morris Centre.

Their first few years were extremely difficult. They realized that marketing was all about customer relationship and branding, yet since they were new to the area, no one knew them. They quickly got involved in the local fall fair, the school, church and community soccer. And even though finances were tight they donated to certain causes raising their profile arranged for local clubs and schools to come for a tour, and volunteered their time speaking to schools about farming and local food.

They also began selling their produce at the Sarnia and Petrolia markets where they could meet with more people and advertise their Pick Your Own and country store and . Friendliness from them and their employees has also been a big key to their recognition.

Environmentally-wise, in 2010, they started on a Foliar Micronutrient Plan which allows micronutrients to be applied when needed directly to the crops for optimum efficiency of nutrients. They are also practicing natural Nematode control instead of using fumigation. With their farm being flat and out in the open spans of Lambton county, they are highly affected by wind erosion and grow oats as a cover crop.

Also in 2010, they upgraded their irrigation system. They dug and installed a 4” underground delivery line down the length of the farm. This benefits them in many ways: 1) stops leakage-saving water. 2) prevents pipes from being driven over and ruined. 3) saves labour from moving

pipes. 4) allows them to provide drip irrigation wherever they want on the farm. The system also doubles as a sprinkler for frost protection.

Besides being full time farmers, sales people, and community stewards, the Zekvelds have four children – Phillip (15), Jessica (13), Devyn (10) and Eddy (7),