

CELEBRATE KINGS: Pride in our people, places & products

The magic of mushrooms

Bursting with flavour, delicate and tender to the bite, the succulent mushrooms grown locally at Valley Mushroom Company Limited are a health lover's dream!

Thriving in carefully controlled farming conditions; the tasty, vitamin-packed mushrooms are the result of more than 18 years of study and work by Valley Mushroom managing partner Leonard North. For the past eight years, he has developed the best possible product at the company's location on Randolph Road in Waterville, Kings County.

Growing up in Canning, Leonard knew he eventually wanted to farm a unique product that was not readily available locally. "From a marketing point of view, I thought it would be a good idea," he explains. He moved south to study mushrooms at Penn State University.

Mushroom pathology especially interested Leonard. "Disease is the most limiting factor in mushroom production. I wanted to learn how to get around the difficulties."

After working in the mushroom business stateside, Leonard returned home to Kings County to begin his own farming operation. For many reasons, he considers the area an ideal location for his business.

"Kings County is an agricultural area with regular trucking to outside markets, so we can fit in with other things going out." Leonard continues, "We use poultry manure as a compost supplement, and this is the county for poultry production, so it's readily available. There is a strong labor market, and a great local supply of peat moss and straw."

Farming at Valley Mushroom is conducted indoors with three-quarters of an acre under cover. The farm – co-owned with his wife and his brother – employs 17 to 20 people at any one time. And it enjoys a very unique position in the marketplace.

"We're the only growers of white button and portabella mushrooms in Nova Scotia," says Leonard. "The normal white buttons are a mature market, but the hearty portabellas are very much a growing market."

Enjoying a strong customer base mainly within Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Valley Mushroom supplies wholesalers as well as stores and restaurants. A retail counter is located at the farm, where the public can buy fresh, flavourful product directly.

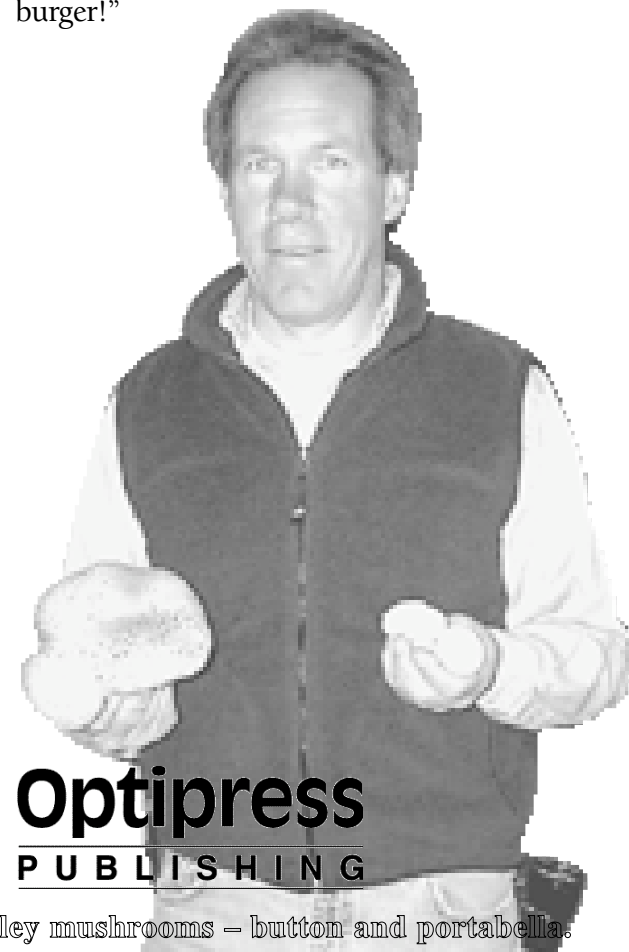
With such an active and growing market, Leonard plans to expand his Kings County business. "If you're not growing, you're going backwards!"

For mushroom lovers, the freshly picked produce is a delight to the palate. Chock-full of healthiness, both the white button and the larger, stronger-

flavoured portabella provide a wonderful part of the daily meal plan, containing lots of potassium and B-complex vitamins.

Another exciting ingredient of mushrooms is selenium. Combined with Vitamin E, it produces antioxidants that neutralize "free radicals" and help reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases of aging. And they can be fun to eat.

"The large portabella cap can even be barbecued," declares Leonard. "Just slap it on a bun with ketchup and mustard in place of a hamburger!"



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Leonard North and Valley mushrooms – button and portabella.