

April 29, 2013

St. Catharines Standard

■ EVENTS



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VegFest organizers Laurie Morrison and Keri Cronin explore the downtown farmers market.

Festival celebrates veggies

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Are you veg-curious?

Are you interested in finding out how hard it would be to live on a plant-based diet?

Organizers of Niagara VegFest say they have answers for you.

The second annual festival celebrating all things vegetable, all the time, has a lineup of speakers and exhibitors that will show that a plant-based lifestyle is easier, more affordable and tastier than you may think, Laurie Morrison and Keri Cronin say.

Cronin and Morrison say the high-profile speakers coming to this year's festival include Dr. Michael Greger, who interprets scientific, peer-reviewed nutrition information and makes it understandable and funny, and author and certified holistic health counsellor Victoria Moran, who wrote *Mainstream Vegan* and who is a vegan lifestyle coach.

The organizers say they were overwhelmed by the number of people who came to last year's VegFest, and they learned that interest in what they call "healthy, compassionate eating" was bigger than they thought.

"There is an explosion of interest in this topic," Cronin said. "This is a great opportunity in this region to bring all these people together for one day under one roof"

"VegFest provides information and opportunities for people to think about these things."

The women say they have attended VegFests in other cities in Canada and the U.S., but what makes Niagara's unique is that it includes people who are actually producing the food.

"We are very proud that in a growing region like this, we have growers coming," Morrison said. "Most VegFests have the culinary and cooking side. We are adding where you can find locally-grown vegetables."

Cronin and Morrison said people who have made a commitment to vegetarian or vegan eating will find lots of food, information and support, but people who just want to make small changes will be encouraged, too. There's no judgment against people who eat meat, eggs or dairy, they say.

"We understand it's a journey and everyone is in different places on that journey," Morrison said. "We want to help people figure it out."

With a \$2,000 grant from the St. Catharines cultural investment program in the Culture Builds Community category, organizers are able to do more advertising and move the event to a bigger venue.

VegFest takes place June 2 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Market Square in downtown St. Catharines and includes