



LOCAVORE

Mark Cutrara, Cowbell, Toronto (cowbellrestaurant.ca)

Mark Cutrara doesn't like being pegged as a locavore. "I just kind of fell into it by working with local farmers and seasonality," says the 37-year-old chef. "It just is what it is." He's talking about a decision he made in 2007, when opening his Toronto restaurant, Cowbell, to cook almost exclusively with organic and naturally raised ingredients produced within 160 kilometres of his restaurant.

It was a choice driven by respect for food and a desire to support local farmers and artisanal producers. Prior to Cowbell, Cutrara, who studied gastronomy at the Stratford Chefs School, worked under some of Toronto's best chefs, including Albino Silva, Jamie Kennedy and Rocco Agostino. By 2006, he was a partner in the acclaimed Globe Bistro on the Danforth, but was becoming disenchanted with the limitations of traditional fine dining. "After 12 years of cooking," he says, "I couldn't even tell you how many tenderloins were in a cow."

Cutrara quit Globe to learn butchery, and now at Cowbell he processes whole animal carcasses, including cow, elk, deer, pig and lamb, into everything from gorgeously aged steaks and chops to house-made charcuterie, sausages, carpaccio and burgers. He also works with poultry (duck is a favourite), local trout, perch and whitefish, house-churned butter, artisanal cheeses and immaculate seasonal produce. These all star in heartfelt and unpretentious dishes that seem as close to a true Ontarian cuisine as possible. "You have to treat all your ingredients as though they are precious," he says. □