

This tractor, pulling a mini farmhouse, will travel from Prince Edward Island across Canada. (CBC)



Professor to drive tractor across eastern Canada

Wants to draw attention to food production

John Varty, a McMaster University history professor, begins his cross-Canada trek on board a farm tractor on Friday. (CBC)

A university professor from Ontario is on Prince Edward Island to kick off his unusual trek across eastern Canada on Friday.

John Varty will drive a tractor with a mobile farmhouse behind it, hoping to learn more about the lives of the average Canadian farmer and share those stories with Canadians.

Travelling with him are his partner, Molly Daley, and cameraman, Michael Lieu. They plan to drive through the Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario.

The history professor from McMaster University in Hamilton, wants to draw attention to how food is produced and the struggles faced by farmers.

"Only three per cent of Canadians farm, but 100 per cent of Canadians eat, so it's a really important story," Varty said Thursday.

He and his team are making a documentary about his trip and, along the way, they hope to visit farmers.

"There's lots of material out there about food, about what we eat. But, you know, it only tends tacitly to deal with farmers and what they deal with day-to-day and on an on-going basis," Varty said.

"And I want to actually give farmers a voice — not just a passing one, not just a trite one. I want to really sit down with farmers and have an extended chat about what they do for themselves and for us."

Varty kicked off his fact-finding mission at a tractor dealership in Charlottetown. The dealership supplied the tractor, and Massey Ferguson is sponsoring the trek.

Varty and his team will stay in the mobile farmhouse along the way.

The tractor will be at the Rustico Canada Day parade on Saturday, and next month it will be at the Hartland Potato Festival in New Brunswick.

The idea is to hit as many small town community festivals as possible.

People can follow their progress at tractorcanada.com.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/story/2011/06/30/pei-tractor-trip-professor.html>