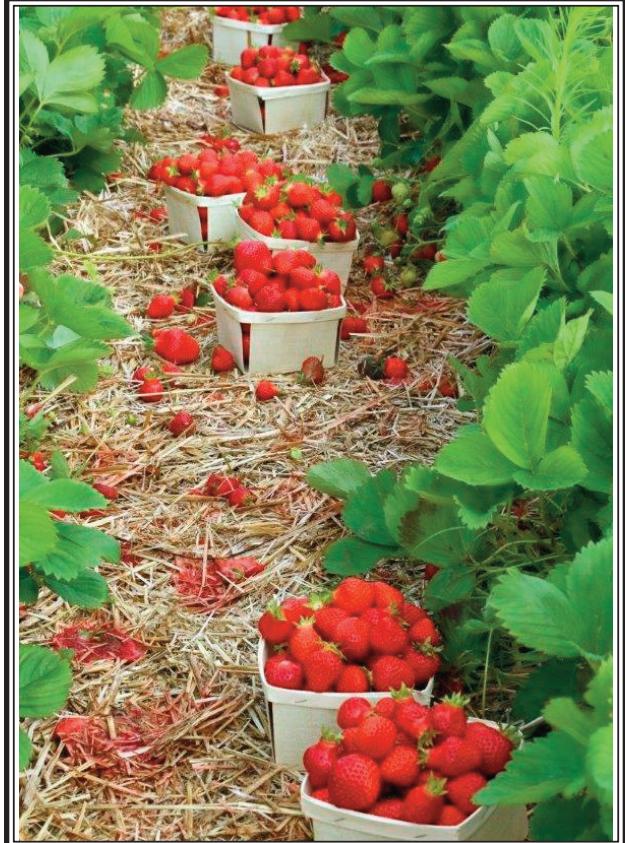


One of Millen's workers with mask and gloves displays a handful of berries just picked. (Harrington Photos)



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Worker Shortages Create Challenges

By Linda Harrington

Plump red strawberries have been showing up in grocery stores and farm markets for a few weeks now and many have been enjoying their annual strawberry shortcake fix, thanks to efforts of local farmers.

Covid-19 has provided additional challenges to the harvest this year in a sector already facing its share of struggles to remain profitable.

Curtis Millen, of Millen Farms, says his workforce has been down about 40% this year, with workers arriving late and then undergoing a mandatory 14-day isolation. At the start of the season Millen Farms had to deal with a delay in getting plants in the ground and then made the decision to plant 20 acres less of the day neutral berries. "Some workers are just getting here now and then they have to isolate for 14 days, which is too late for our peak picking times." He estimates a loss of 60-80 acres because there just wasn't enough labour to pick them. "There has been a demand in the stores, but we have been short on average 30-40

pallets per day," he says.

Joe Cooper, of Balamore Farms Ltd., also had to deal with late arrival of workers this spring and the added expenses of meeting Covid safety measures. He says the season has been a bit shorter due to the warm weather but hopes everything will turn out. "Nothing is certain until the season is over," he says, adding the fall export of strawberry plants looks to be business as usual at this point.

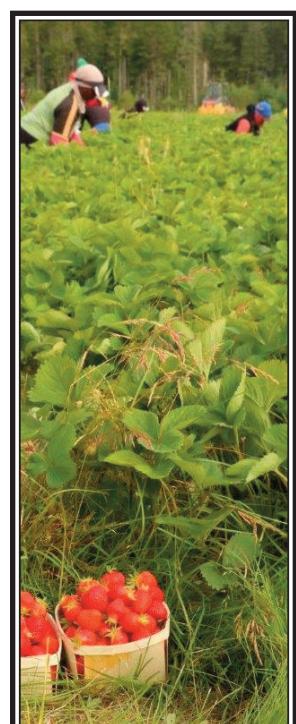
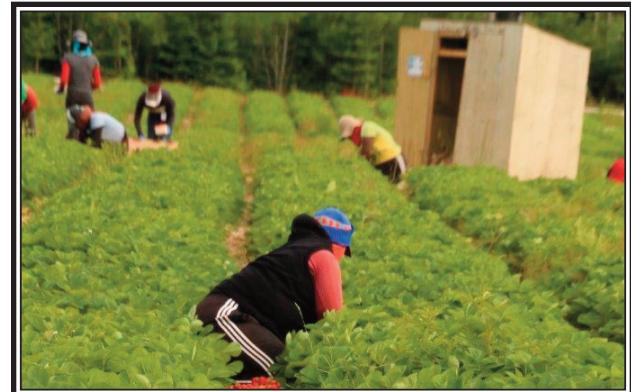
Farmers play a very important role in Nova Scotia's economy and Curtis would like people to realize the value of Agriculture. "Nova Scotia is dependent on its resources and none are as renewable as agriculture, which is replaced every year," he says. "At the end of the day everything that displaces an import or

creates an export is new money. If California sells a load of berries here, our dollars are being exported to the US. So, it just makes sense to support our local farmers."

Consumers are demanding top quality produce for their dollars and our local farmers are trying to meet their expectations. Masstown Market often makes daily trips to Millen Farms fields to bring back a load of straw-

berries which Curtis Millen says is ideal. "People want well picked good berries, and when the Market truck comes right to the field, the berries arrive as fresh as they can be."

The day neutral variety of strawberries will keep fresh berries on our table into October, extending what was once a late June to mid-July crop. Buy local and support our farmers!



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Stay Safe!*
The Shoreline Journal

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