

Wild Blueberry Producers Looking Forward Not Back

By Linda Harrington

Farmer's are used to tough times, fluctuating prices and the necessity to diversify and cut costs. Wild blueberry producers faced a low price of 20-22 cents/lb in 2017. Money might not have been pouring into the bank this past August, but high quality wild blueberries were still pouring into bins and totes as farmers continued their harvest to keep supplying markets.

Wild blueberry producers in Nova Scotia harvested over 45 million pounds this season, the 5th biggest crop on record. The combined 2017 total wild blueberries produced in NS, NB, PEI, QC and Maine was 261 million pounds, down substantially from the record crop of 403.5 million pounds in 2016. Peter Rideout, WBPNS Executive director says Maine and New Brunswick had very dry weather this harvest season resulting in lower crops in these regions, with Quebec returning to their normal average after a massive crop in 2016.

Peter Burgess, Perennia reported the NS crop was harvested early across the province with a good sized fruit and quality. There were less acres harvested, but the total has not been tallied yet. Some producers made the choice to not harvest low producing fields in an attempt to cut their losses and help lessen the surplus of berries.

There has been an increase in the Canadian export of wild blueberries, with a large volume going into Europe and the

United Kingdom. 89.5 million pounds were exported to the top 10 markets as of August, 2017. A total of 172.5 million pounds were export worldwide in 2016.

John Cameron, President WBANA Canada is encouraged by a recent Canadian trade mission to China where a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Jinjung Group of Shanghai. Discussion from the membership focused on working hard to ensure a 47% tariff is removed from the sale of wild blueberries in China, so the fruit pricing can become more competitive.

Cameron said WBANA Canada and US continues to support Health Research, which reflects the significance of the anthocyanins found in wild blueberries. He was pleased to announce Dr. Willy Kalt is now a Health Research Consultant with WBANA Canada.

Guest presenters at the AGM focused talks on increasing profitability, managing inputs and maintaining a quality product during the changing industry. "The way we have done things in the past is not the way we are going to do them in the future," said WBPANS President Barron Blois, who also stated, "We need to have an open mind and discuss solutions in a calm and rational way."

The WBPANS Committees have been busy supporting the

industry over the last year. Jim Baillie, Chair of the Industry and Sustainability Committee says the committee has been looking at efficient production of quality fruit during the depressed market, supporting operator training courses and encouraging new entrants.

The Research Committee continues to support several studies and projects focused on the wild blueberry industry, says Chair, Barron Blois. The Canadian Wild Blueberry Industry Research (CWBIIRD) has recently begun work on a new project with pooled funding from three provinces.

Alice Pugsley, Chair of the Promotion Committee gave an update on the exciting events and new marketing concepts. WBPANS was well represented at both Saltscapes events again this year. The Wild Blueberry Festival Kick-off was the most successful yet, with over 2000 in attendance. The Visitor Center Exhibit at Fort Lawrence has been updated, complete with a new video feature and there have been updates to the Halifax airport display, with a video feature in the arrivals area, too. Attractive new wild blueberry shopping bags have been purchased and distributed at the Masstown Saltscapes event and to the membership.

Wild Blueberries are available year-round in the freezer section of local supermarkets.



WBPANS Executive Director Peter Rideout presents John and Charlotte Mattie with the certification of Induction into the WBPANS Recognition Book. (Harrington Photo)

Mattie's Inducted into WBPANS Recognition Book

By Linda Harrington

John and Charlotte Mattie have been growing wild blueberries for more than 50 years on their home farm property in Monastery, eastern Antigonish County, NS. They took over the operation from John's father, who had begun with wild blueberries when John was a young boy. You can find their farm along Route 4, marked by a big wild blueberry that John constructed from a large sphere-shaped metal buoy.

John and Charlotte have done extensive land levelling over the years; including the removal of some very massive rocks. They were among the first growers to develop irrigation for wild blueberries in the province, for frost and drought relief, using solid set main lines and excavation for a large irrigation pond. John has also kept honeybees for years and is a firm believer in having a strong bee population program.

John is a mechanical innovator, and with the help of his friend and wild blue berry grower George Grant, completely built his own mechanical harvester as well as many other pieces of equipment. One such innovation was a burner with a stainless-steel hood that reduced oil consumption from 20 gallons to just over 4 gallons per hour.

John is the sort of grower who is extremely generous with his support for others. He is well known throughout the county for his helpfulness when fellow growers are having mechanical troubles. He has been known to stop his own projects to help those who are in need.

For a long time, John and Charlotte have operated a receiving station in rural Antigo-

nish County, to support other small growers in the area with purchasing and marketing of their crop. John designed a processing line, including an initial blower and cleaning table, with a sizer for fresh and frozen wild blueberries. They also have 20-ton capacity freezer storage and a juice press that Jon designed and built.

The Mattie's have been faithful participants at the Mabou and Antigonish Farmers Markets, selling wild blueberry juice, wild blueberry jelly and frozen wild blueberries. They also have many loyal customers who make the trip to Monastery to buy frozen wild blueberries directly from their farm. Charlotte has the food quality lead in their family operation, ensuring products, such as their tasty wild blueberry jelly and nutritious wild blueberry juice, are made to highest quality standards.

John and Charlotte attribute much of the success of their operation to the efforts of their children and grand-children, who take vacation time to work many long hours during harvest time. They are very pleased their granddaughter, Sam, works in the industry.

John and Charlotte have been industry leaders and have exemplified the importance of local value-added agriculture. Their farm, "Wild and Blue" is a wonderful example of the entrepreneurial ingenuity and creativity needed to enhance and sustain rural Nova Scotia.

It is for these many reasons the Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia is pleased to honor John and Charlotte Mattie and add their names to the Wild Blueberry Recognition Book for 2017.

The Savvy Shopper

in Downtown Truro

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