Wild Blueberry Association of Nova Scotia 2018 Annual Meeting

Photos by Linda Harrington

Value Added Products Key to Industry Growth

By Linda Harrington

For the second year in a row, the WBPANS Annual Meeting included an afternoon devoted to Wild Blueberry Product Innovation Workshop. This workshop is intended to encourage and provide tools to explore value added products supporting the future growth of the wild blueberry industry.

Utilizing modern technology, Marion Bartlett-Simon, WBANA Account Manager, MK2 Agency Hamburg, Germany was able to join the meeting via skype from her home in Germany and give a very interesting presentation on the Hamburg University Wild Blueberry Products Challenge.

Students at the University developed exciting new products which include wild blueberry chocolates, ketchup, mustard, chutney, a fruit bar and syrup. The products were sensory tested with 70 consumers and will be presented at Food Ingredient Europe Expo in 2019.

Greg Connell, President Nurture Atlantic gave a presentation on Consumer Behavior and Food Market Trends. It was encouraging to note that 28% of millennials see themselves in a better place than last year and consumer spending shows they tend to buy more, less often. Plant-based foods are growing in popularity with 40% of consumers are trying to increase consumption in their diets.

Consumer studies show 50% think breakfast is the most important meal of the day but 54% want a preparation time of 5 minutes or less.

Peter Burgess spoke on behalf of Lynne Godlien about Agri-Food Accelerator Program launched in late August. The focus of this program is to: support access to new markets through skills development and information, as well as food safety support, analytical testing and training to meet scientific, retailer and market expectations for safe food and to support the successful commercialization of Nova Scotia agriculture-sourced products into recognized retail markets through skills development and information, as well as market research validation and prototype product development and scale up support with the intent to have the product successfully reach the intended market with sales longevity.

The deadline for the program was October 31st, but there are still funds available if anyone wishes to apply.

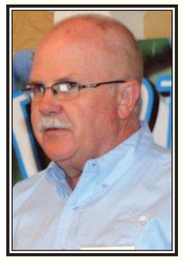
Licia Elder, NS Dept. Of Agriculture- 2018 Wild Blueberry Solutions Challenge reported the pilot project was a huge success with 14 high quality proposals submitted supporting innovative uses of wild blueberries. The project is closed now but it is hoped it will continue next year. The 2018 applicants have been reduced to a short list and an announcement will be made in the near future.

Koh Matsumoto, Executive General Manager at Aohata Foods gave an excellent information session on New Product Trends in Asia. Aohata has been a wild blueberry customer since 1981. He noted the Asian consumer is well educated about the health benefits of polyphenols in foods. In 2014, blueberries were the third highest fruit consumed, behind cherries and mangoes with 40% of consumers saying they preferred the flavour of blueberries over other fruit and vegetables. There are more prepackaged frozen blueberries showing up in the retail stores.

Koh had some excellent slides referring to the problem of promoting wild blueberries over other "blue" berries. He says the manufacturers know the difference but this is not being passed on to the consumer. Referring to the WBPANS marketing photos of rural wild blueberry barrens, Koh said these images are priceless and should be getting them in front of the Asian consumer.

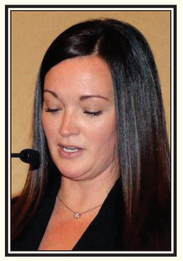
Gary Morton, SKU Food had some interesting points for getting a Great Idea to Viable Business. He noted it is not always the best plan to do what everyone else is doing, quoting John F. Kennedy, "'"The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways." He said it is important to find out what consumers want before developing a product and if a product is too unique it may be very costly trying to educate the consumer.

The 2018 WBPANS Board of Directors. Back (l to r): Peter Rideout, Peter Swinkels, Jonathan Millen, Alice Pugsley, Mark Austin, Jeff Orr; Front (l to r): Art Sargent, Don Mingo, Joe Slack, Peter Van Dyk, Janet Geldart, Barron Blois. Missing from Photo: Jeff Perrin, John Cameron.

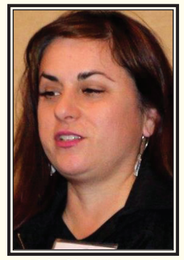


Peter Rideout, WBPANS Executive Director, says much activity this year within the Association has focused on the situation that arose after the devastating frost in June.

Perennia's Peter Burgess gives an update on the Nova Scotia Wild Blueberry.



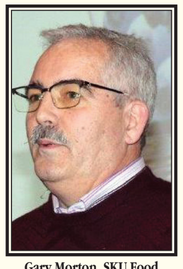
Melissa Quin, ACOA's Economic Development Officer, moderated the Wild Blueberry Product Innovation Workshop on Thursday, Nov. 15.



Licia Elder, NS Dept of Agriculture was pleased to report 14 proposals were received for the 2018 Wild Blueberry Solutions Challenge.

Dr. David Percival - Dalhousie University Agriculture Campus, Department of Plant, Food, and Environmental Science updated the association on Integrated Disease Management in Wild Blueberry Production.

Greg Connell, Nurture Atlantic, provided information on consumer behavior and food market trends.



Gary Morton, SKU Food offered insight into taking a new idea to a viable product, which was helpful for those considering value added products.

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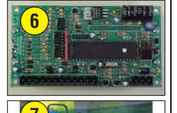

1) **Mechanical Blueberry Harvester** - Reel-type picking head side mounted to a tractor; picking head follows contours of the ground. Reduces harvesting costs as much as 50%.
2) **Blueberry Gang Mower** - BGM-3 Gangmower three mower heads mounted in a staggered pattern under a tow frame. Available with 3-foot or 4-foot mowing heads with a cut path of 8'6" and 11'6" respectively.
3) **Roadside Mower** - Single head, side mount mower 5-foot head. There are 25 units in operation throughout Nova Scotia. Units are used in bush cutting operations and roadside mowing in the State of Maine.
4) **Excavator Mower** - Single head, boom mount mower has 5-foot head. Head is mounted to the excavator boom using existing bucket mounting pins enabling mower head to mow contour of the ditches.
5) **Highway Median Mower** - BMM-5 median mower is a combination of 2 mid-mount 5-foot side mowers mounted on left and right sides of 90 HP tractor unit and 2 five-foot heads with 1 four-foot head mounted under a tow frame with a total cut path of 21'6". All heads are independently raised and lowered.
6) **DBE Electronics** - We offer contract electronics manufacturing with an emphasis on product quality and on time delivery. Manufacturing capabilities include electronic assembly, printed circuit boards and cable assemblies for prototype to production run quantities. No quantity is too large or too small.
7) **Cranberry Harvester** – This is the latest addition of Doug Bragg Enterprises's lineup of custom manufactured products. This machine is intended for dry picking cranberries with as little waste as possible and with virtually no damage to the bog. The ground pressure with the recommended setup is less than a foot print of an adult of average size.

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Nova Scotia Wild Blueberry Crop Volume Hits 16 Year Low

By Linda Harrington

The total Nova Scotia wild blueberry crop harvested in 2018 dropped to 22 million pounds due to a devastating frost event in early June, just as blueberry blossoms were at their peak. Other areas were hit as well, resulting in a total crop throughout Canada and the US of 219.5 million pounds. This is down almost 50% from the record crop of 403 million pounds in 2016. The good news is inventories have been reduced and producers are hoping this will help increase the low price their wild blueberry crop has been receiving on harvest. The global demand for wild blueberries is approximately 300 million pounds.

Wild Blueberry Producers of Nova Scotia President Barron Blois noted the markets continue to be strong and the Board of Directors is working hard to address challenges within the industry.

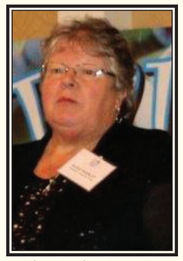
Dr. David Yarborough, University of Maine reported a decrease in total acres in marginal fields in both Maine and Canada, noting some of these are not coming back and some have gone to organic production. "Maine has the land to produce more with better weather conditions but there will be adjustments in who is growing wild blueberries with production increasing in Canada and decreasing in Maine," says Dr. Yarborough. He stated the need to differentiate the wild blueberry from regular berries, saying "Always wild, never tame!"

Peter Burgess, Perennia noted the variability in severity of frost damage across the province suggesting factors such as the development stage, field slope and orientation and the previous cop treatments all had an effect on the amount of damage. The 5 year rolling average is 51.8 million pounds, with the average yield per acre in 2018 at only 1100lbs/acre, down significantly. The best crops were seen along the Parrsboro shore towards Advocate, with very poor inland fields in central Nova Scotia.

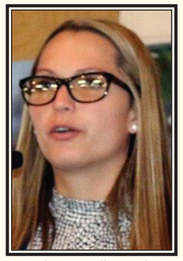
There is some concern about the 2019 crop fields, especially those that were mowed of after the frost event. "In June, for three weeks the plants just sat and stopped growing," says Peter. "This has resulted in some fields with short plants going into next season." He suggests keeping inputs and efforts going on good fields with extra attention to double crop fields.

The Atlantic Tech Transfer Team has been busy with research into wild blueberry pollination. Dr. Robyn McCallum discussed the queen rearing project, which has included training for beekeepers. There is ongoing research into Miticide Efficiency and Resistance but at this time Apivar and Bayvaro are very effective.

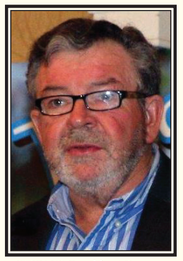
WBANA- Canada President John Cameron noted the number of countries importing wild blueberries is increasing, and the low per capita consumption in many countries has great potential for world demand. It says the differentiation of wild blueberries is more important than ever, with the health benefits, taste and growing location being the strongest attributes.



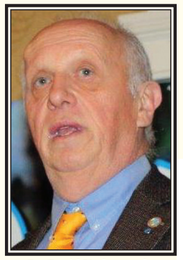
Alice Pugsley, Promotion Committee Chair, gives an update on all the activities and events taking place this past year focusing on wild blueberry promotions, including the Wild Blueberry Festival held each August.



Dr. Robyn McCallum, Atlantic Technology Transfer Team in Apiculture presented the latest research involving pollination in the wild blueberry industry.



WBPANS President Barron Blois reports the markets for wild blueberries around the world continue to expand.



Dr. David Yarborough, University of Maine gave a World Blueberry Production Update.

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Don't Be Afraid to Be Different

By Linda Harrington

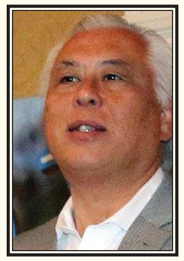
Keynote speaker Koh Matsumoto, Executive General Manager at Aohata Foods gave an excellent talk, following up on his previous presentation, New Product Trends in Asia, held on Thursday.

Koh compared the benefits of wild blueberries to other fruits in the food processing market, noting other fruits require processing with up to 40% loss whereas wild blueberries can be used whole, reducing costs. "There is no loss, they are the perfect shape and texture to process, they have a great taste and a defining color," says Koh, adding all these things add up in cost calculation. "The wild blueberry is entitled to be a higher price, as a premium product."

Koh says the Japanese consumer likes the flavour of blueberries and the berries are being added to ice cream, yogurt, jams and more. Most blueberries (wild and cultivated) are imported to Japan from Canada.

Thirty-seven years ago, back in 1981, the first container of wild blueberries was shipped to Japan and now the market is in excess of 140 million pounds, but Koh says there is much room for growth and the industry needs to work on educating the consumer about the differences between wild blueberries and cultivated.

"Don't be afraid to be different. Keep telling who you are because that is what your customers around the world want you to do. No one can imitate the wild blueberry because they are only from this region."



Keynote Speaker Koh Matsumoto, Executive General Manager, Fruit Procurement, Aohata Corporation of Hiroshima, Japan says in 1981 Aohata purchased just one container of wild blueberries and now purchase in excess of 140 million pounds.

Colleen Cameron facilitated the WBPANS and Wild Blueberry Industry Planning Session.

Direct from Germany via skype, Marion Bartlett- Simon gave an exciting update on the Hamburg University Wild Blueberry Products Challenge.

The Shoreline Journal

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