

Wild Blueberry Association of Nova Scotia 2021 Annual Meeting

Photos by Linda Harrington



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Wild Blueberry Producers Realize Higher Price for Crop

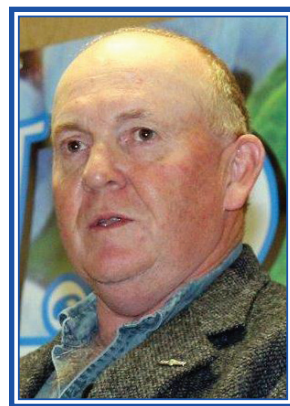
By Linda Harrington

The 2021 Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia (WBPANS) AGM was held both in person at the Best Western Glangary and online via a Zoom meeting. WBPANS President, Peter Swinkels noted the wild blueberry industry is the third largest exporter of product out of Nova Scotia, providing a significant input into the economy of NS. He said despite challenges throughout the years, there is good positive growth in the prices and the WBPANS Board of Directors will continue to work on price stability.

The 2021 production year saw a very early growing season, some advanced by as much as two weeks which also caused an ideal weed conditions. There were good to exceptional yields in every corner of the province with some yield loss at the end of harvest, due to the extreme heat. Nova Scotia harvest was about 50 million pounds, better than the 5-year average. Maine was back to a normal harvest of 85-90 million pounds. New Brunswick had a reduced harvest of 55 million pounds due to drought and frost, down from their usual 75-80 million pounds. PEI was a little below average at 19 million pounds and Quebec had an exceptionally low harvest at only 30 million, significantly down from the 95 million pounds of last year. Total volume was about 244 million, just below the 5 year average

of 249 million pounds. Producers this year have received 80 cents/lb, a more profitable price up from the low of 25 cents a pound in 2017. This comes as a relief to producers who have suffered through low prices, a devastating frost in 2018, winter injury in 2019 and a drought in 2020. Like all sectors in agriculture, climate change is having direct impact on profitability. "We are entering a phase of growth and transition," says Peter Burgess. "The Markets are healthy, and the farm gate prices are healthy."

AKSO Marine Biotech Inc., Halifax is this year's winner of the Wild Blueberry Solutions Challenge and has been awarded \$126,000, to be used to help grow sales, pursue new export markets and develop new products. These projects will use blueberries as a leading ingredient, includ-



Tim Marsh, NSFA President presented the Report from the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.

ing our sea cucumber ingredients. The Wild Blueberry Solutions Challenge is a competition among Nova Scotia companies to develop innovative value-added products and packaging solutions. It is a joint initiative between the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture and the Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia.

"This unique project will help integrate two successful industries and healthy products. The commercialization of this new product will build on the wonderful health benefits

Technology Advancement Looks Promising

By Linda Harrington

The Wild Blueberry Technical Session was held on Day 2 of the Conference with several speakers providing important information for the producers.

Dr. David Percival, Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture presented a review of some of the ongoing research including work with drones to detect the presence of blights in the fields, various wild blueberry clones and the growth of plants and development of fruit buds. There have been some very promising results from this research with the drones able to pick up disease pressures, especially monilinia. There has been an 80% accuracy in identifying the Vangustifolium f. nigrum clone, with more work underway.

Dr. Percival and his research team have also been looking at the molecular responses of wild blueberries to fungicides and the development of bio fungicides to stim-



ulate the blueberry in order to get better tolerance. Research into the effects of fungicides on soil health indicated no huge effect on the micro-organisms.

Research into the development of a "Prescription Map" for the overall wild blueberry field using UAV equipment

shows an innovative new approach to field management. In conjunction with smart sprayers, this cutting-edge technology has potential for significant savings in agro-chemical applications. Three-dimensional maps of the future could show the height of plants and density of coverage to allow automatic adjustment of harvester head heights and more. The maps could be used to detect damage from fungicides or frost and the presence of rust or botrytis. The future looks very exciting for this research.

Weather this past summer was very good for weed growth and Dr. Scott White, Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture presented his latest research on ways for controlling some of the priority weeds. Fescue continues to be one of the most frustrating weeds to get under control. Research has been looking at a new Group 2 chemical Chikara

Dr. David Percival, Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture presented promising results from ongoing research projects.

of wild blueberries and export them around the world," Peter Swinkels, president, WBPANS. Tim Marsh, NSFA President reported there were over 90 Environmental Farm Plans completed this year. "We Talk, We Grow" is an initiative of Farm Safety Nova Scotia raising awareness and taking action to protect and nurture the mental health and well-being of Nova Scotia's farming community and enhance and maintain a culture where mental health is valued, prioritized and protected. Visit <https://wetalwegrow.ca/> for more information. The 126th NSFA Meeting will be held on *continued on page 14*

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Barbara & Louis Babineau Receive Recognition Award

By Linda Harrington

Louis and Barbara Babineau have had a long-standing commitment to the wild blueberry industry. They both were raised in families that had been trailblazers in the industry. Raymond and Anna Smith, Barb's parents, developed land in the Newville area. Harvey and Leoni, Louis's parents, grew strawberries, carrots and wild blueberries in the Parrsboro area. Their parents passed on a love for the land and a passion for growing wild blueberries. The land Louis's parents farmed was one of the rockiest parcels in the Parrsboro area. Louis always felt his father chose this land so the rock picking would keep him and his brothers too busy to hang out around Main Street. This and many other chores certainly taught them a strong work ethic and a curiosity for growing. Barb's father Ray cleared a lot of his land out of the woods on weekends and evenings.

In the early days, before mechanical harvesting, Barb ran the raking crew that picked their land. At the time, some of the best rakers in the area knew that harvesting for the Babineaus would be a good gig, because the Babineaus always kept their land in top shape, using the lat-



Neil Parry, NS Farm Loan Board presented information on the new Wild Blueberry Enhancement Program.



Jeff Orr (right) read the citation for Louis and Barbara Babineau and presented them with their certificate as an inductee into the Wild Blueberry Recognition Book for 2021.

est production techniques. With his father and brother, Louis spent a number of years trucking berries and carts for the Bragg group and made many trips to Hants and Pictou counties to pick up loads of wild blueberries. They also did a lot of custom burning, mowing, and harvesting when not busy on their own land.

When mechanical harvesters were just coming on stream, Louis was an early adopter, receiving the third harvester built by Doug Bragg. Art Sargent received the second one, and Bragg Lumber the first. Louis is well known in the industry for his ability to see issues with machinery and to improve them. For instance, in the first year of the harvester, there were no wheels and you had to carry the head on chains. This presented some serious problems for harvesting. The vines were short and land leveling was in its infancy. Louis was an early innovator in land leveling, he did ploughing of rough fields before excavators were adopted. Louis has made many modifications to the harvester that also supported others who often copied these improvements. He changed the rear gears, moved the roller, and experimented with head diameter. In

the early years, the industry had no experience with precision around picker bars. Louis noticed the teeth were getting thinner and purchased new bars to start a new season. This led to a dramatic increase in yield and all-of-a-sudden there was a scramble among harvester operators to secure new bars because Louis's daily yield was far superior. These are just a few of the many innovations Louis made.

Louis has been an outstanding wild blueberry producer getting maximum yields from his land because of his curiosity to learn and innovate and his strong capacity to build things.

When Louis invents things that improve his operation, he has always been open to generously share with others to improve their operations. He thinks it is important to look at making a few changes each year and this has made a world of difference to him and many others who are observant of his changes.

For their constant life-long commitment to improving their fields, production technology and practices and their generosity of sharing these with others, WBPANS is pleased to recognize Barbara and Louis Babineau by entering their names in the Wild Blueberry Recognition Book.

Producers Recognition - Judy & Arthur Sargent

By Linda Harrington

Art and Judy Sargent have been involved in the wild blueberry industry for almost six decades. Art's parents Ray and Nita ran an automotive business in the town of Parrsboro and began dabbling in wild blueberries when Art was a youngster. Judy, whose parents were Deforest and Georgie, grew up in a family dedicated to trucking where she too learned the value of work.

Art and Judy took a great interest in both businesses and worked to develop, improve, and expand them both while also raising a young family. They have made a life-long commitment to investing in these businesses to improve the economy and strengthen society in the Parrsboro area and have cultivated an interest in the industry in the next two generations of Sargent family who will eventually take over these operations.

From the earliest days, Art and Judy took a great interest in improving and expanding their land base. A significant percentage of the Parrsboro flat within the old town limits of Parrsboro has been developed and expanded and they have been dedicated to improving this land base. Art and Judy purchased most of the Graves land in the Parrsboro area in 1978. This land had belonged to the Orff and Cushing blueberry company of Maine that had come to Parrsboro in 1949. From there they continued to acquire properties on the Parrsboro flat, in the vicinity of Parrsboro and down the shore towards Port Greville. Art can tell you stories about every little corner of this land. They invested lots of time and energy into moving wild blueberry sods from hilly areas to fill in flat land more suitable for production. They have also done significant amounts of land drainage and have invested in ir-



Jeff Orr (right) read the citation for Art and Judy Sargent and presented them with their certificate as an inductee into the Wild Blueberry Recognition Book for 2021.

rigation systems. Art and Judy have invested in wild blueberry technology. In 1973, they purchased a Chisholm Ryder Harvester for \$3500 from the US, spending more money to convert it to run off a Massey Ferguson tractor. They were second in line to purchase one of the early Bragg harvesters, and among the first in NS to import the Woolery Burner from Bridges Brothers, of Elgin, NB.

Art is also well known for his keen awareness of the importance of honeybees to pollinate his crops and spends a great deal of time moving the hives around his fields during the pollination season.

Art has been very active on the WBPANS Board, twice serving multi-year terms and continues to present ideas he thinks may improve the industry.

For their life-long commitment to improving their land, investing in innovation production and land development strategies and for their constant encouragement of other growers and the industry in general, WBPANS is pleased to recognize Art and Judy Sargent and to enter their names into the Wild Blueberry Recognition Book.



Jack Sibley was recently inducted into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame. Jack spent much of his career working to advance the Wild Blueberry industry.



Neil Erb, WBPANS Finance Committee presents the 2022 badge to the members.

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- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

JR Tardif, a leader in flail mower technology designed for blueberry fields in the Maritimes, had samples of machinery on display at the annual Wild Blueberry Producers of Nova Scotia (WBPANS) 2015 Field Day.

JR Tardif is a leader in flail mower technology designed for the Maritime Provinces blueberry fields. We have responded to customer's requests for a 54" flail mower to fit onto 25 hp tractors. We work with you to increase the yield from each acre, fill in bare spots and help make you more money. We can also supply you with chopper mowers, ToolPost Puller mower, stump grinder, flail mowers and now flail mowers for compact tractors.

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