



Avard Bentley's family joins him for a photo following the Induction of he and his wife Jean into the 2022 WBPANS Book of Recognition. Left to right: Michael Bentley, Nancy Bentley-Barrett, Sandra Moss, Avard Bentley, Marney Bentley and Mary Gabie.

## Avard & Jean Bentley 2022 Inductees in WBPANS Recognition Book

By Linda Harrington

The Wild Blueberry Producers Association has had a Recognition Book since 1980, and each year a person(s) is recognized for their outstanding contribution to the wild blueberry industry. This year's inductees were Avard and Jean Bentley.

Avard and the late Jean Bentley devoted their lives to improving their land so that it could provide an economic return for their family. Throughout Avard's childhood, his mother and father always hand-picked for other growers, possessing very little land of their own. Avard claims that as a young child he got his start hand raking for his parents but wonders if he was more of a hindrance than a help in those early days. As adults, Avard and Jean always took their vacation time to help his parents with harvest. In 1950, Avard remembers his family sent 32 crates of quart boxes of wild blueberries to Montreal for the fresh market. Things grew from there when his parents bought a small field around 1966. In 1970 he bought a 20-acre field with his father. With the passing of his father in 1978, Avard and Jean began to farm full time in 1980. They quickly modernized the operation, buying the first mechanical harvester in the village of Westchester.

Avard and Jean gradually bought land as it came up for sale in the area around Westchester. Their farm is among the best examples of operations that evolved by investing heavily in the time-consuming task of clearing woodland, leveling it, and developing it for its wild blueberry potential. One such field began with 25 acres and now is over 100 acres. In total they have cleared and levelled several hundred acres. Avard notes that he wore out two excavators doing this work because he states they had to do everything themselves. They spent years getting rid of rocks, stumps and brush. Their son Michael once told of a story of when his dad told him

he was going to take him to a rock concert. Michael's enthusiasm waned when he discovered this meant a day on the field picking rocks while listening to a ghetto blaster.

When the children were young, Jean spent a great deal of her time raising them, but once the last of their children got off to university she began doing more of the work for the farm. Her involvement in the day-to-day activities of the operation was enormous. She managed the office and did the bookwork as soon as she and Avard moved to Westchester full time. In the early days, at harvest time she ran a small crew and picked those sections of fields that you couldn't ask a regular hand crew to harvest because every pound was important. She participated in, and eventually managed, the cleaning/winding process of blueberries that came into the shed prior to being shipped to the plant. She weighed all the berries processed through the farm until one of the girls took over the shed operations because as the business expanded, she needed to spend more time in the office.

All of Avard and Jean's 5 children helped with the blueberry operation. Their oldest children, Sandy and Nancy helped with the harvest when younger but could be described as more reluctant participants than the others. It was not the highlight of their summer. The youngest, twins Marney and Mary, moved with their parents to Westchester when their parents took over the business. They worked on the farm every summer as there was no shortage of work. They helped with fertilizing, spot spraying, rock picking, hand raking, cleaning, gathering and weighing berries. Like her parents before her, Marney continues to this day to take her vacation at blueberry season to help manage the operation in the blueberry shed and do some of the bookwork her mom used to do. Marney is an active blue-

## 2022 Wild Blueberry Crop Hits 347 Million Pounds

By Linda Harrington

The 2022 Nova Scotia Wild Blueberry Conference was held Nov. 17th and 18th at the Best Western Glengarry, Truro. There were close to 200 registered for the event, with some still following the speakers online but most attended in person.

WBPANS President Peter Swinkels was happy to be back for an in-person conference, the first since the pandemic, giving growers the opportunity to network and socialize with industry partners and fellow producers.

The 2022 Nova Scotian wild blueberry crop is ex-

pected to be the largest since 2016, totally nearly 60 million pounds. There are currently 630 registered growers, with 70% of NS production occurring on farms based out of Cumberland/Colchester and Pictou counties.

Demand for wild blueberries continues to be high, with exports of 100 million pounds from the Maritimes provinces to more than 25 different countries. There were 347 million pounds of wild blueberries produced in the Maritimes, Quebec and Maine this year, the second highest yield ever recorded in the industry.

Swinkels was pleased with the continued growth in the industry. The Association is focusing on ways for producers to be more efficient through applied research; better access to capital; more resiliency through environmental and financial fluctuations and working with industry partners to try and stabilize access to goods and services.

Producers were disappointed with the farm gate price they received following harvest this fall. Last year the price initially paid in Nov.

2021 was .80/lb (rising to \$1.12/lb by August, 2022). This year they only received .70/lb despite a significant rise in their input costs. A producer, who did not want to be named, said he was expecting a higher initial price/lb, knowing the frozen inventory had been depleted last year. "We put a lot of work into growing more berries/acre to then find out the size of the crop is now pushing the price down. We have already spent considerably more on input costs such as fuel and chemicals." The wild blueberry is most often grown on a two-year rotation, with a farmer carrying financial deficits from inputs over the two years, making it difficult to budget two years in advance.

The WBPANS Board continues to work with partners to try and stabilize price fluctuations. Executive Director Peter Burgess says maintaining a stable inventory of wild blueberries will help with marketing and sustainability. "We feel we can increase our productivity by 50% in the next 8/10 years without any increases in land base by increasing the field productivity/acre."

## Buzz Word on Pollination

By Linda Harrington

Just like bees need flowers to produce honey, the wild blueberry growers and beekeepers need a symbiotic relationship for both of their industries to succeed. A pollination panel at the NS Wild Blueberry Conference saw invested partners sharing information.

Jason Sproule, Provincial Apiculturist with the Dept. of Agriculture says there are currently 946 registered beekeepers in the province, with 218 new entrants. In 2021, there were 27,751 hives with 17,840 of these used for pollination.

This past winter saw a huge 45.5% beehive mortality rate across Canada, causing a grave concern for those requiring pollination. Jason congratulated the Nova Scotia beekeepers for doing a great job at keeping the provincial mortality rate down to 15.3%, the lowest across Canada in the last few years.

Paul Kittilsen has been a beekeeper for 40 years, renting out hives for pollination to some of the same customers year after year. He says, "you must do pollination to be a beekeeper in Nova Scotia." His "bee year" starts in March with treating the hives for disease,

encouraging the production of new bees and feeding as necessary until the hives go to the wild blueberry fields for pollination.

This year the costs for building hives and foundations has gone up, along with the cost of fuel and the price of imported queens and yet the amount of honey produced per hive went down. "There is a lot more corn and soybeans instead of hay. The biggest challenge is the declining forage pasture," says Kittilsen.

He says it is important for the wild blueberry producers to talk to the beekeepers about their needs. "If you don't need us for a year, let us know as soon as possible and we will still come back the next year." The same goes for increases in the number of hives, the sooner the information is received the better.

Peter Van Dyk is a wild blueberry producer and emphasizes the importance of having a good relationship with your beekeeper. He recommends using 3 hives/acre for best pollination and moving bees into the field when there is 15-20% open bloom. "It is a lot of money to put pollinators in the field, but I feel it is a worthwhile investment. If you have large fields, then they should be put in multiple locations." Peter has also built cages that hold 2 pallets of 4 hives each. This protects the hives from bears instead of using an electric fence.



Jeff Orr makes a presentation to Avard Bentley, honouring Avard and his late wife Jean as the 2022 inductees into the WBPANS Book of Recognition.

berry producer herself. Avard and Jean's son Michael has been very involved, working full time for the business for the last 25 years and has taken over most of the farm management.

Avard Bentley has always attended WBPANS meetings each year. He is an active supporter of the Association and served on its board for several terms. He was very involved when the Association began to invest in freezing containers and helped oversee the transfer of these assets to the long-term financial reserves of the Association.

Today, Bentley Farms has 12 harvester heads and a wide array of other state-of-the-art equipment. They continue to do a significant amount of harvesting and custom spraying and mowing for customers, including Bragg Lumber Company. This custom work represents about half of their farm operation time. They also run a large maple syrup operation.

Avard and Jean Bentley started with almost no capital, equipment or land assets and,

through relentless honest work, developed a large and prosperous wild blueberry business. They represent an excellent example of the importance of determination and commitment when growing wild blueberries. For their lifelong commitment to improving their land, their loyalty to customers and their ongoing contribution to adopting best management practices for the wild blueberry industry, WBPANS is pleased to induct them into the Nova Scotia Wild Blueberry Recognition Book. Congratulations Avard & Jean!



Also see the Wild Blueberry Producers

AGM photos

on pages

16 and 17.

"Build with wood...store carbon"

"One of many solutions the forest sector can provide"



Forest Nova Scotia

CONTACT:

Forestry Outreach Coordinator,  
Forest Nova Scotia,  
Todd.Burgess@ForestNS.ca  
902-890-1193

TURNERS' EXCAVATING  
AND TRUCKING

41 Onslow Mt. Road, Belmont



All Gravels, Backhoe, Dozer, Roller,  
Septic Plans And Installation,  
New Land Development, Driveways, and Culverts.

Cells (902) 890 5409, (902) 890-7348,  
(902) 897-7688

PROTECT & PRESERVE  
YOUR FAMILY MEMORIES



VHS Home Videos  
Transferred to  
Digital Disk

JD MacLean  
& ASSOCIATES

Print Layout/Correction  
Audio - Video Production

jmaclean@eastlink.ca  
128 Oakwood Drive  
Truro, NS B6L 1N4  
902-893-3466