

Van Dyk's Now Producing Dried Wild Blueberry Products

By Linda Harrington

Casey and Henrica Van Dyk landed at Pier 21, Halifax in 1954 and soon began farming near Caledonia, Queens County. As they expanded the farm, they discovered wild blueberries on their property and by the 1960's they were farming a few acres of wild blueberries.

In 1986, they set up a com-

mercial fresh pack wild blueberry business, supplying fresh-picked berries to grocery stores from Yarmouth to Halifax. In 1996, the year Casey and Henrica both turned 65, they built a new plant for their fresh pack business.

The Van Dyk's soon discovered selling fresh wild blueberries in a four to six-week harvest window had its limita-



Peter Van Dyk gave an update on his family's use of value-added products, including the popular Van Dyk's Wild Blueberry Juice and new dried wild blueberry products.

tions. To build a more sustainable business, they decided to produce wild blueberry juice, a product that could be sold year-round. The juice production began at the Kentville Research Station and was moved in 2001 to the plant in West Caledonia.

"The idea was to use the lower grade berries to make the juice," says Peter Van Dyke, "But our father wanted a top-quality product and so we upped the grade several times and eventually went with Grade A berries. This ensures a product that always tastes the same."

Case Van Dyk, who passed away last year at the age of 86, always felt if you provided the very best quality product, the consumers would acknowledge this over time.

With the success of the juice product and a surplus of wild blueberries in the industry, the Van Dyk family started

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researching the manufacturing of dried wild blueberries a few years ago. They discovered the majority of dried product on the market was sugar infused and oil added. "We wanted to have a healthier dried product that would retain the nutrients of the wild blueberry," says Peter.

Five years later, the equipment has been installed and dried wild blueberries are now being manufactured at Van Dyk's By Nature in Caledonia.

The process initially uses air drying towers with convection ovens to dry berries down to 50% moisture. The second stage of the process uses microwaves under vacuum to remove the remaining moisture at a very low temperature. "We are able to remove up to 98% of the moisture, retaining most of the nutrients, without added sugar or oil," says Peter.

Peter expects this new product to have a huge market potential. They are currently marketing three dried wild blueberry products- a 2-3 % moisture ground powder, 2-3% moisture berries and 12% moisture berries.

Peter Van Dyk sees this new product helping offset some of the surplus wild blueberries on the market. "It takes 1/2 lb of Grade A berries to make 40g of dried product, so the potential is there to use a lot of wild blueberries," he says. The Van Dyk's currently farm 500 acres of wild blueberries.



The use of wild blueberries in new value-added products is welcome news for WBPANS. Van Dyk's By Nature was sampling three new dried wild blueberry products- a 2-3 % moisture ground powder, 2-3% moisture berries and 12% moisture berries.



John Cameron, WBANA- Canada and Peter Rideout, Executive Director WBPANS sample the new dried wild blueberry products served by Nichole Van Dyk at Van Dyk's By Nature booth.

Cautious Optimism for 2018 for Wild Blueberry Producers

By Linda Harrington

The Winter Information Meeting for the Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia (WBPANS) took place on March 24th at Best Western Glengarry, Truro. WBPANS President Barron Blois welcoming remarks reflected a cautious optimism about the industry as he stated, "Despite challenges things are improving. There may not be more dollars in our pockets this year, but things are looking promising."

Nova Scotia's 2017 wild blueberry crop is estimated at 50 million pounds. Producers received 20 cents per pound, providing estimated farm cash receipts of \$10 million. In 2014, the crop was 62 million pounds, with farmers receiving 55 cents per pound, for a total farm cash receipt value of \$38.2 million.

The field price has fluctuated over the last 10 years, from a high of \$1.05/lb in 2007 to the low of .20/lb in 2017. The efficiency of production has increased from an average of about 1300lbs/acre in 2011 to close to 2500 lbs/acre in 2017.

WBPANS Executive Director Peter Rideout began his Global Market Update, by highlighting the importance of the industry saying, "This is the only place in the world where wild blueberries are grown as a managed commercial crop."

The total 2017 North American wild blueberry crop was estimated at 266 million pounds, down from the huge crop in 2016 of 403.5 million pounds.

Canadian exports of frozen IQF wild blueberries to the US

has decreased from 67 million lbs in 2016 to 47 million in 2017. Overseas exports to Europe and the UK are up from 47 million in 2016 to 74.4 million in 2017 and exports to Asia are up from 19.3 million in 2016 to 23.6 million in 2017.

Despite the issue with tariffs into China, the export market continues to grow here. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in November

with the Jin Jiang Group, a leading hotel group in China. The recent CETA agreement has created more opportunities for export of wild blueberries in Europe.

Looking ahead to 2018, Peter says he is more optimistic than he has been for a couple years. The reduced holdings in the US, lower Canadian inventory, plus aggressive sales and marketing programs to move more vol-

ume are all positive for the industry.

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