

Japanese Buyers make Blueberry Tour



A group of top sales people for the Blue Flag company of Japan stopped for a tour of the Wild Blueberry Institute in Debert. They were joined by Dave Sangster, Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Producers Association and Dr. Dave Percival, Wild Blueberry research Chair at the NSAC.

Story & photos by Linda Harrington

Seventeen top buyers for the Japanese Aohata Corporation (translates to Blue Flag Corp.) stopped by Debert for a tour of the Wild Blueberry Institute on Dakota Road, August 19th.

Aohata Corporation is a \$6 Billion company, similar in size to the Smuckers or Kraft in the United States. They are the largest buyer of wild blueberries in Asia, using 1500-2000 metric tonnes of berries in jams, yogurt and for fruit preparations.

The group's visit was sponsored by Oxford Frozen Foods. "We have been buying from Oxford for the last 30 years and we were the first Japanese company to purchase wild blueberries. We only use wild blueberries in our jams and all are Canadian blueberries," says Koh Matsumoto, General Manager for Q & B Foods Inc..

The Japanese buyers toured the Oxford Frozen Food production plant on August 18th, spent the morning in Debert on the 19th and were heading to PEI for an overnight stay.

"They want to see the differences between cultivated and wild blueberries. In Japan they see the finished product but they are not familiar with agriculture," says Mr.

Matsumoto. "They are here to view the whole process, from start to finish."

Dave Sangster, Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Producers Association of Nova Scotia, welcomed the group to the Wild Blueberry Institute and showed them an extensive display of value added wild blueberry products including ice cream, jelly and even soap.

Dr. Dave Percival, Wild Blueberry Research Chair at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, presented a slide presentation on the wild blueberry production cycle, how the plant grows and current research activities.

Following the morning presentation the Japanese group enjoyed tasting fresh wild blueberry muffins, scones and juice. "Baked goods such as these are very expensive in Japan," said Mr. Matsumoto. "Most of the wild blueberries are consumed in jams, yogurt and things like ice cream. It is very expensive to get the fruit by itself."

The Japanese delegation headed to a wild blueberry receiving shed on Plains Rd. for a quick tour of the facility and then on to a field on Middle Road.

Mr. Sangster brought several hand rakes into the field and they were given a lesson in how to rake wild blueberries. Cameras flashed as they tried their hand at raking for the first time and enjoyed tasting the juicy fruit, fresh from the vine.

When asked about the recent devastation in Japan, Mr. Matsumoto says the

Aohata Corporation was located on the western side of Japan and fortunately did not suffer any damage from the earthquake this past year, in fact business has been busy. "After the nuclear accident the Japanese had to conserve 15% of the power. This meant they stopped cooking, began buying more store bought things like bread and as a result they are using 20% more jam," he said. "Japan will need to import more wild blueberries to meet the demand."

This is good news for local wild blueberry producers who have suffered through lower prices for a few years.

The group of Japanese buyers stopped by the Masstown Market and viewed the wild blueberry products display before heading on to PEI.

"It was very nice to have them here," says Dave Sangster. "We had a group of Japanese jam producers visit



Hiroshi Yoshimori, a sales agent for Kewpie jams in Japan, gives blueberry hand raking a try for the first time.

last year, and like this group, it is important for them to see how these berries are grown and the whole production process. They take this information back home and where they can use it to help increase sales with their buyers."



A delegation from Japan tours Bragg's wild blueberry receiving shed in Debert.



Members of a Japanese tour group examine some freshly raked berries, as Dave Sangster (center) explains the variations in blue colour.



Jacob Robinson had some fresh wild blueberries for sale at the Bass River Heritage Day celebration on August 20th.



Five year old Erin Miller had a tough choice to make! Delicious wild blueberry desserts lined the table at a Blueberry Tea held at Saint James United Church on August 21st.



Mateya Brine tops up Fran Forman's wild blueberry dessert with a little whip cream. The Masstown United Church supper was a sell out success.

Wild

BLUEBERRY PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

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Wild Blueberry Harvest Festival

Nova Scotia

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WILD BLUEBERRY PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA

Suppers, dances, breakfasts and plenty more fun and festivities were held throughout the Wild Blueberry Harvest Festival. A great way to celebrate a crop that is grown throughout our Shoreline area.

www.nswildblueberries.com OR www.wildblueberryfest.com

Visit our website for health information and recipes. We are a major sponsor of Wild Blueberry Harvest Festival held in the last two weeks of August. The wild blueberry industry is a major contributor to the provincial economy.