



ONTARIO BERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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August 2009 NEWSLETTER

Presidents Report

Another strawberry season has come and gone. The key words to summarize it are the number of frost events this spring, and rainfall. On our farm we can add winter-kill. Our 2008 planting lay under water for several days twice this winter resulting in heaving. Our deer-grazing damage was less this winter because a field of corn nearby was left out all winter, and the deer had their smorgasbord over there first.

In speaking to other strawberry producers, the number of frost events was a common story. Perhaps almost twice as many events as compared to the average. As such, picking starts were delayed, and smaller berries resulted. Then there was a rainfall during prime picking time. On our farm, during the first thirteen days of picking we had eight days with rain. Some areas were better off than this, and some areas were worse.

So overall there were fewer berries picked, and making it to market. In this area a good estimate may be from half to a two-thirds of a crop on average. Some growers reported having their worst season ever. I did hear from one shipper though that California was not a factor this year because the warehouses were never full. But also now, with the rains of late, the day-neutrals are getting that "wet-spot". So for strawberries it has been a rough season.

For summer raspberries there has been a good crop in most parts – except that there have been mould issues. The blueberries in this area are reported to have very good potential. Also, on a

positive note, the local food movement continues along strongly. More regions have produced the "Buy Local Buy Fresh" map, and there are new Farmers Markets this year. Also, in the little bit of traveling I have done this summer, I saw Adam Dale's plots in Simcoe, and on behalf of the OBGGA I wish to thank the researchers for all their hard work. I believe in research and we need to keep pushing for it.

In ending, hope to see you at the Twilight Tour in September.

Regards,

Andy Megens

From OBGGA Headquarters

When growers are asked how their season has gone the word "challenging" seems to be the common response. Winter kill, frost and rainfall were all common challenges for strawberry growers. Raspberry growers had a great crop and many struggled through record rainfall trying to pick the crop. The blueberry crop was variable at best but with a large crop for most in 2008 this was expected. Preparation for the 2010 crop is underway and hope springs eternal.

The OBGGA office remains busy with new funding programs to administer. We have been very fortunate to be receiving regular funding to help maintain some of our research activities over the last few years. The latest program announced is the Farm Innovation Project that will see the OBGGA receives an annual allocation for \$17, 470 for four years. The Highbush Blueberry Association also received an allocation of funding to help support research initiatives involving blueberries.

If you have any research priorities please forward them to me when you think of them.

All the best.

Kevin

Achene Report

The Ontario propagation program continues to become known around the world. The lab in New Liskeard which produces plants from tissue culture continues to expand its plant sales to new buyers in Canada and the US. These sales are valuable as they bring in dollars to help support the program and ensure we have a source of tissue culture plants for our Ontario growers.

We need to thank Becky Hughes and her staff for their continued efforts on behalf of the OBGA.

Thanks
Norman Charbonneau
Achene Committee Chair

PREMIER'S AWARD FOR AGRI-FOOD INNOVATION EXCELLENCE

WHAT'S NEW

Applications are now being accepted for the fourth year of the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence program. The deadline for submissions is November 16, 2009. Awards will be announced in 2010.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence was established in 2006 to recognize and foster innovation in the agri-food industry. The five-year, \$2.5 million program (now in its fourth year) encourages the development of prosperity in Ontario's rural communities and on farms by recognizing innovations that add value to existing products, create jobs and drive economic growth. As many as 55 regional awards, valued at \$5,000 each, can be presented each year. Recipients of the Premier's Award (up to \$100,000) and the Minister's Award (up to \$50,000) are selected from the regional winners.

WHO CAN APPLY?

A farmer, primary producer, groups of farmers, combination of agri-food businesses, or agri-food related organizations are all eligible for recognition under this initiative. A farmer must be one of the applicants in any group (i.e., eligible to obtain an Ontario Farm Business Registration number).

The innovation must have been developed and have been in use on an Ontario farm, or be in the planning stages of development with a business plan towards implementation. The innovation must also have the potential for use on a broader basis and

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ELIGIBLE INNOVATIONS

Examples of types of innovations include, but are not limited to:

- improved farm practices
- responding to consumer demands
- environmental stewardship
- health and safety on the farm
- energy innovations
- education and marketing of agriculture to society
- local food
- traceability

DEADLINE

This year's applications must be received by 5 p.m. on Monday, November 16, 2009. Eligible applications will be reviewed by two independent panels comprised of a cross-section of Ontario's agri-food industry. Additional information, guidelines and applications forms are available on the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs [website](#) or by calling the Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300.

LEARN MORE

Learn more about past [award winning innovations](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/prmier_award/2008/winners.htm) http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/prmier_award/2008/winners.htm

PMRA Berry Inspection Programs 2009

The OBGAs office was alerted that the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) would be conducting two inspection programs in 2009. We were told of this on August 10th when some of the inspections had already taken place.

The objectives of the first inspection program are:

- To assess the pest management practices specifically relating to label requirements for pesticide use, including use of registered products, adherence to restricted-entry intervals (REI), pre-harvest intervals (PHI) and personal protective equipment (PPE) to determine whether compliance exists and, if not, identify reasons for non-compliance.
- To provide growers with information on Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) and the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA).

The inspection staff will also be taking samples to check for pesticide residues.

The second inspection program is an assessment of Agritourism and U Pick Operations. There is no sampling involved just a completion of a rather lengthy questionnaire. The program objectives are:

- To collect and assess information regarding pesticide use at U-pick (Pick-Your-Own) farms and agritourism locations.
- To assess information on current farm practices regarding restricted entry intervals (REI) and preharvest intervals (PHI).
- To promote compliance by providing growers with information on Health Canada's PMRA and the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA).
- To inform growers of the need to read and follow pesticide label directions regarding REI and PHI.
- To identify any region-specific compliance issues in U-pick farms or agritourism activities.

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Ontarioberries.com

We will be updating the OBG website
www.ontarioberries.com

We still have a few members that do not have their farm listed on the website. We will be contacting these growers to make sure that members get this great value as part of their membership

Please take the time to review your farm content to ensure you have all the information you would like consumers to see about your operation.

If you have any suggestions or changes that would enhance our website please contact me to discuss your ideas. We have some money from the Ontario Market Investment Fund for upgrading our website. Kevin

Voluntary Check-Off

I would like to thank all the growers who have sent in a payment for their plant purchases from Nova Scotia. To date we have collected over \$3000. If you purchased plants outside of Ontario and would like to contribute to the voluntary check-off please contact the OBG office and I will have a form sent to you.

Thanks for your generosity and support of the OBG research and promotion initiatives.



3rd Annual *Get Fresh Strawberry Festival*

We were able to secure all the sites we needed for our annual strawberry festivals having 19 farms participating in 2009. The timing was challenging as strawberries were late coming into production but in the end the feedback was very positive. The date has been set for 2010 (later than last year) and we hope to grow the festivals more each year. Festival participants will be receiving a survey to help us improve things for next year so please return them once they arrive.

Promotion Report

The OBG received funding from the Ontario Market Investment Fund in late June which delayed some of our plans for promotion this summer. This program is a shared cost program in which the OBG pays half of the costs of the promotional activities.

We will be printing promotional brochures for strawberries, raspberries and blueberries. The brochures have been improved and will be available for delivery for the upcoming growing season at a subsidized rate.

We are looking for ideas from our members as to best spend the dollars from this program.

Our funding allows us to spend money on the following activities

- Production of Marketing Materials

- Media Releases and Advertising
- Foodland In Store Contest
- Point of Sales Materials and Signage
- Development of Trade Show Materials
- School Berry Deliveries
- Website Refreshment
- Online advertising

If you have any ideas or suggestions as to what might be of benefit to you or other members under any of these categories please let me know.



Food Safety Training Kit

The OBGA office received a training kit from the food safety program at the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC). The kit was designed to be used by trainers from the industry but I think it could have some merit for on farm training. The kit contains a binder and CD containing PowerPoint presentations and includes a number of demonstration items.

If anyone would like to borrow this kit please contact the OBGA office.

CHC Food Safety Manuals

I had a number of growers contact the office this spring looking for CHC Food Safety Manuals. Retail buyers were asking growers to adhere to food safety guidelines that were developed by the CHC. As a member of the CHC the OBGA is granted access to these manuals so if you are looking for a manual for either fruits or vegetables please contact the office and we can send you a hard copy or an electronic copy of the manual of your choice.

Something to Sell?

If you are looking to sell some equipment that you are no longer using or any other supplies that might benefit a fellow berry grower consider putting an ad in an upcoming newsletter. At \$25 an ad it targets fruit and vegetable growers. Many members have had good success with advertising in the past and fall and winter newsletters are more likely to be read more thoroughly by growers.

OBGA Annual Twilight Meeting

Wednesday September 16th, 4:00pm
Whittamore's Farm
8100 Steeles Ave. E., Markham,
Ontario
Cost \$10.00-\$15.00

Whittamore's are long time OBGA members with a great reputation for growing and marketing berries. We will have the opportunity to see a fabulous farm market and a selection of berries and vegetables that are grown to market in the GTA. The Whittamore's grow a large acreage of strawberries, raspberries, sweet corn and pumpkins. The twilight meeting will start with a farm tour and as always will include a BBQ dinner arranged by our hosts.

Confirm your attendance by calling Kevin Schooley at 613-258-4587 or emailing at info@ontarioberries.com

The Farm is located on Steeles Avenue E., which is 6km east of Markham Road (Highway 48). When travelling along the 401, take exit 389 (Meadowvale Road) north past the Toronto Zoo and follow the blue and white signs to our farm. If travelling along the 407 take the Markham Rd (Hwy 48) exit and travel south to Steeles Avenue. Drive east on Steeles Ave 6 km to the farm.