



ONTARIO BERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

30 Harmony Way, Kemptville, ON, K0G 1J0

Phone 613 258-4587 Fax 613-258-9129

Email: info@ontarioberries.com Web: www.ontarioberries.com

January 2015 NEWSLETTER

Presidents Report

Our industry is one that faces several challenges: pest pressure, disease, government pressures, marketing, labour, viruses, land and water hurdles, research uncertainties and, of course, the weather. In 2014 we were all affected by each of these issues to varying degrees. With the OBGA Annual Meeting approaching and the OFVC on its heels, your organization has worked to develop two full days of topics that touch on each of these stressors. These winter meetings provide such a valuable time to network with other people in the industry and learn and grow from others experiences. I look forward to seeing you all there – don't forget to book your hotel reservation and join us in the hospitality suite the evening of the 17th.

As I look forward at the berry industry I aim to be realistic about our challenges. I am grateful to the OBGA for being a voice and defender for Ontario berry growers. Moving forward there are several aspects of the industry that lead to the need for a stable funding mechanism for OBGA. The board of directors have been working with outside groups and government to develop an organization that can meet the needs of growers. It is time that we take a hold of the problems we face and find a way to unite and fund our industry.

During the AGM growers will be presented with an outline of the current system we are proposing. This is a work in progress and it requires input from all Ontario berry growers. The end goal is to create a funding formula and

mechanism that we can all work with. We need to develop a board structure that fairly represents all interests and a system that growers can work both in and with. This requires active input from all involved and I look forward to generating some great discussion over the course of the meetings.

I hope that you continue to let your organization work for you and that you look for opportunities to work within your organization. Given the depth of issues we face, our reliance on each other and, a sound working model of representation will serve each farmer best.

Always looking forward,

Jenn VanDeVelde, President

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From OBGA Headquarters

We are in the coldest part of winter these days or at least the last few weeks have shown some interesting swings in temperatures. We have gone from a low of minus 27C to above freezing today in less than 30 hours in the Ottawa area. Fortunately for strawberry growers here there is a reasonable snow cover to help the straw protect the plants. Blueberry and raspberries however will have to face this cold on their own. Let's hope temperatures return to normal for the remainder of the meeting.

The OBGA annual meeting in Niagara Falls and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention are less than a month away so take a look at the two day berry program and hopefully there is several talks that interest you. These meetings if nothing else provide an opportunity to talk to your colleagues in the business. I have heard from several top notch growers that all they need is one or two good ideas they can implement on the farm to make going to meetings to make it worth their investment in attending. Berry growers continue to face challenges and many of the challenges will be discussed and solutions are often presented.



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The OBGA continues to look at a funding model to provide stable funding to help provide funding to the organization to be able to remain active in research and promotion activities. Government funding has evolved to now ask for matching dollars and organizations with money will continue to be able to access funding and those have not sectors will see their research and promotion activities dwindle. There is an update in the newsletter and this will be part of the discussion at the meetings in February.

I look forward to seeing many of you in February.
All the best!

Kevin Schooley

Achene Report

The Achene Committee met in January. Becky informed the committee that an order has been placed for 20,000 ornamental strawberry plants. Although these plants do not play a role in our industry, this order helps to financially support our program in New Liskeard.

Finding a new location for the Verification Trials was discussed, as Strawberry Tyme is going to discontinue its role with it. This will be further mentioned in this newsletter.

The future of the Summer Series strawberry varieties was discussed again. To-day only Lareault maintains any licenses for any of the Summer Series. Further discussions to take place for next steps.

A summary was provided of royalties collected in 2014. The net to the OBGA is down \$7000, and is expected to continue to decline with a lack of interest in Guelph cultivars and the potential of no one growing northern cultivars in Ontario. For revenue generation we

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need a winner or need to promote the cultivars we presently have. Breeding appears to be heading more to private companies making it difficult to find new varieties. Finding new varieties is therefore important. A new late variety named Summer Daisy may have potential. Also two new DN varieties from Michigan were noted. As next steps these issues will be explored.

The committee will meet again in early spring to work on the challenges facing the industry.

Best Regards

Andy Megens
Chair, Achene Committee

National Raspberry and Strawberry Research and Promotion Council Update

There has not been any announcements regarding this initiative. There are several other commodities waiting to hear the fate of strawberries and raspberries. Perhaps we are too close to a federal election for any action to take place.

The OBGAs as an organization in its present state would not be able to be active in such a council. If the industry was to accept a new organization as a "local board" we would likely be able to participate in one of these councils or agencies.

OBGA Membership

Thank you to all the growers and corporate members who have sent in their membership renewals.

If you haven't returned yours please do so at your earliest convenience. If you have lost your membership form you can get one from the OBGA website under the Growers and Members

section or I would be happy to get one to you another way.

Food Safety Webinars now available

Written by Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Association

Looking to keep up to date on the latest food safety practices and help strengthen your Growing Forward 2 application? OSCIA is once again offering food safety webinars covering 6 different topics, taken from the comfort of your home or business - all you need is an Internet and phone connection. The workshops are open to all farmers, but have a primary focus on the horticulture industry. Contact foodsafety@ontariosoilcrop.org for details.

Register at:
http://registration.wildapricot.org/food_safety

Topic: Cleaning and Sanitizing

This session focuses on the significant role cleaning and sanitizing play in producing safe food on-farm.
Date: Wednesday, January 28, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time

Topic: Pest Control, Building Maintenance and Visitors

This session focuses on the impact pests, building maintenance and visitors can have on the safety of the food you produce and identifies ways to implement good agricultural practices to reduce these risks.
Date: Wednesday, February 11, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time

Topic: Soil Amendments

This session focuses on using soil amendments such as manure, compost or compost teas for soil fertility and on the food safety risk if not used properly. Good agricultural practices, and the role they play in reducing the risk when using soil amendments, are highlighted.

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time

Topic: Pre and Post-Harvest Water
Water used prior to harvest and post-harvest plays a significant role on the safety of the food you produce. This workshop explains the role of good agricultural practices in reducing the food safety risks associated with using contaminated pre and post-harvest water.

Date: Wednesday, March 11, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time

Topic: Recall and Traceability
An effective recall program is critical to the success of your business. This session will discuss the importance of developing and implementing a recall program; equipping participants with the knowledge and tools to implement a facility-level traceability system and perform a mock recall.

Date: Wednesday, March 25, 2015
Time: 7:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time

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Volunteer(s) Needed.

The Achene Committee of the OBG is looking for at least one grower willing to plant and maintain a verification trial of northern June bearing strawberries.

It is estimated that there will be 10-15 varieties making for 20-30 plots of 12 plants. Growers will be asked to plant, mark and map out the planting and maintain the planting for two harvest seasons. It is estimated that this would be less than 1000 feet of row.

Once each year during harvest members of the Achene Committee would meet at the farm to evaluate the varieties. The Achene committee is willing to offer a \$500 honorarium for the planting and managing of this trial. If you are interested in cooperating on this venture please contact Kevin at the OBG office.

Ontario Berry Growers Local Board Proposal – Main Points

The long term objective of the OBG is to make berry growers in Ontario more profitable and thereby enable the sector to expand and provide an important crop alternative to Ontario farmers.

To contribute to the sustained profitability of the growers it serves, the OBG will focus its activities in three major areas: Marketing, Research and Government Relations.

What are the benefits of incorporation under the Farm Products Marketing Act?

- More stable cash flow and greater fairness as all growers deriving benefit from the work of Ontario Berry Growers pay a share of the cost of the organization

- Stronger voice for representation at the national level with other provincial associations and greater scope for participation in national initiatives that benefit Ontario
- More funding available for research and development projects
- More capacity to leverage dollars from government programs to accomplish more results in research and/or marketing
- More impact in dealing with government agencies such as Foodland Ontario and CFIA
- Able to hire and retain effective staff as a valuable resource for the sector
- Able to develop policy and represent berry growers' interests in government forums (for example – minimum wage, prebudget consultations, etc.)
- Able to disseminate information to more growers making them better informed

- Currently not all growers contribute to the provincial marketing and research efforts – however, all growers benefit from actions completed by the association
- One cohesive voice from the Berry industry where media, consumers, government and researchers can best support the industry
- There is definite and degrading resources and funding from the government levels. Commodities need to supply their own funding towards marketing and research – several other horticultural commodities have already instituted mandatory boards
- A greater capacity for involvement at a National level
- There will be no change to how growers market or sell their crops and no change to current supply management systems, on-farm activities and individual farm sales or prices but growers can expect a advertising presence through OBG and its connections

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There are currently two methods of raising funds for the new organization being proposed. Both involve an acreage fee but one works on a range of acreage while the other would charge for every acre based on a reducing scale for larger growers. This topic will be discussed at the OBG AGM as well as during the berry session of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention.

What is the need for a change from the current system?

Surveys!!

Marketing Survey

In this mailing you will find a marketing survey prepared by Will Heeman. As you will see it is pretty easy to complete as it is all checkboxes.

Please complete the survey and return it to the OBGA office by fax, email or mail. To encourage you to fill out your survey we will be doing a draw and there is \$100 in prize money to be awarded

There will be an opportunity to fill out the survey at the annual meeting. The survey will be summarized and discussed at our meeting on February 17th in Niagara Falls.

Wage Survey

Last fall I had a request from a member regarding what growers pay their pickers. In response I sent out a brief survey via email and received several responses. Below is a quick summary.

Day Neutral Strawberries

All the respondents were paying their pickers an hourly wage (minimum wage) and some growers were offering a bonus based on performance.

June Strawberries

The range for a quart of strawberries was reported to be \$0.50-\$1.25. There was one respondent who was paying \$0.40 per quart but these are wholesale growers with very good picking conditions. The range for a 6 quart flat was \$3.00 - \$6.50. There were a number of growers who are paying by the hour from \$11.00-\$13.00. Some growers paying hourly also had a bonus system in place.

Raspberries

The range paid to pick a pint of raspberries was \$1.75-\$1.25. The flat price was equivalent to the number of pints in the flat in almost all cases.

There were also several growers who pay hourly with a bonus system

Blueberries

We had fewer respondents for blueberries. The range paid to pick a pint of blueberries was \$0.50-\$0.66. Flat prices were directly related to the pint price. Growers are also paying hourly.

Strawberry Variety Survey

Sandra from Carther Plants conducted a survey to help her determine which strawberries growers are most interested in. As part of the survey she asked growers to rate varieties based on a number of criteria including taste, fruit quality and yield.

Sandra shared the results at a recent Achene Meeting. The California day neutral varieties scored highest for fruit quality. Albion and Seascape scored high on flavor. June bearing strawberries that scored highest included Annapolis and Jewel. Summer Rose scored highest among the Ontario bred strawberry cultivars. For more results contact Sandra at scarther@ciaccess.com

