



May 2014 NEWSLETTER

Presidents Report

As we start to see the sun shining and temperatures slowly hover in the positives we are all eager to get the season started. After the coldest winter in 50 years we were cautiously optimistic as we took our covers off and began to survey the crop. While there is variability, most plants are beginning to wake up. Cutting your plant crowns will be a good way to determine how much effect this winter had. The two week forecast continues to look cool with very few double digit temps and cool nights.

At our house spring is always the start of the 6 month long struggle of juggling priorities. We have spent the winter preparing; spending lots of time with the kids, outlining our goals, catching up on paperwork and organizing crop inputs. However, every year spring rolls around and we are faced with the overwhelming realization that you can never prepare enough for the summer life of a farmer. As our kids get older they have started to understand this seasonal behaviour. Time with dad shifts from the arena to the tractor and time with mom isn't playing in the backyard, its 'working' in the store. As parents and farmers we juggle the inevitable tasks of long days and no days off.

Each of us has this type of story on our farm. We each greet spring with the same hesitant excitement. As with the seasons, change is inevitable part of our industry. As we work towards remaining a stable and profitable sector of horticulture I invite you to embrace the changes we face with a positive outlook. As we prepare for a large increase in minimum wage, unpredictable weather and shifts in plant pests, we need to

remind ourselves that a positive outlook in the face of these changes will influence our markets more favorably. Make sure the sound bite your customers hear reflects the positive aspects of your business.

OBGA is supporting some research work this year and we thank Pam Fisher and her team for the continued good work. They will be continuing their work with Spotted Wing Drosophila and working on a strawberry aphid project. I encourage you to subscribe to Pam's Berry Bulletin for the latest updates on these projects and other industry news. OBGA has set our research priorities for 2014. They cover a variety of topics including, SWD, Western Flower Thrips, soil borne diseases and product quality and marketing. We will be posting the full set of priorities on the members section of the website and I encourage you to look them over and provide any input you have regarding research to myself or Kevin.

I'm looking forward to the 2014 season. I look forward to hearing good news from farms across the province and as a farmer I am ever the optimist for a successful and profitable year for all of us.

Good luck juggling!

Jenn VanDeVelde, President

From OBGA Headquarters

We are all anticipating and hoping for warm weather to get things rolling. It is nice to ease into the season but this spring we are really easing in.

You will have noticed that the President's message was delivered by Jennifer VanDeVelde your new president. I have asked many past board members and it is our understanding that Jenn is the first female president of the OBGA. Jenn has been a great contributor to the board over the past 5 years and I look forward to her enthusiasm and ideas to help move the association forward. The term for president is two years.

I want to personally thank Will Heeman for the past two years as he served as president. Will was engaged in many projects and committees and was especially good at driving the promotion committee. We are fortunate that Will remains on the board as Past President and has agreed to continue as chair of the Promotion Committee.

We have a very good mix of young and experienced growers on the board which I think bodes well for the association.

Your board will be working through some challenging projects over the next year as we tackle the idea of providing stable funding to the organization. Stay tuned for more information as this project continues to evolve.

All the best!

Kevin

Achene Report

The Achene committee met in February prior to the annual meeting and as many of you heard Paul Watson has decided to step down as chair of the committee. Paul has served as chair for several years and has been on the Achene committee and the board of directors consistently over the past 20 years in one capacity or another including president of OBGA. Paul should be commended for his service to the

industry and we will miss him at our meetings.

The Achene committee has been fortunate enough to recruit two new members to replace Paul Watson and David Phillips. Kevin Howe has become a representative from the OBGA Board and Tom Heeman has become a grower representative on the committee.

The Achene committee is very pleased that Andy Megens has agreed to chair the committee. Andy is a past president and has been active on the Achene committee for 6 years or more.



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The Achene committee has a number of activities and challenges coming up including promoting our Ontario varieties as well as other Northern varieties to nurseries to provide sustainability to the program at New Liskeard. We also have a new inspector for our field inspections this year in the very capable Maribeth Fitts. Verification trials will be

viewed again by members of the committee to ensure the quality and trueness to type of the plants coming from New Liskeard.

The Achene committee will formally meet again in September prior to the Twilight meeting.

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Membership

If you have not returned your membership please do so at your earliest convenience. We will be mailing out Publication 360 Guide to Fruit Production over the next week so if your membership is not paid up your copy will remain at the office for a little longer.

You will be receiving an email reminder over the next week or so if you have not renewed your membership. We have gained a few new members already this year but at the same time a few growers have retired from the berry business.

Membership remains very affordable and a fantastic value. It would be impossible to get the promotion value

that membership provides for the price and we definitely have lots planned to promote Ontario berries throughout the 2014 season.

National Raspberry and Strawberry Research and Promotion Council Update

We are still waiting on the decision for the raspberry council. It now sits with the Farm Products Marketing Council of Canada to advise the Minister of Agriculture as to whether to support the formation of such an agency for raspberries.

The Strawberry proposal was submitted and there was a lot of comments both for and against. Two hearings were held and I participated in the final hearing in Montreal on April 23rd. Opposition came from the California Strawberry Commission because they felt that the levies would be coming from growers. The Retail Council of Canada who represents the major retailers (Loblaw, Sobeys, Costco, and Metro) also opposed the proposal again because they didn't want to incur additional costs.

The panel has a very interesting dilemma as we learned that other commodities including potatoes and apples are working on proposals of their own. There has only been one successful group thus far that being beef. It will be interesting to see what the outcome is. I imagine it will be a while before we hear about the strawberry proposal.

If you have any questions feel free to contact Kevin at the OBGAs office.

OBGA Promotional Items

We have a good supply of Aprons (lap and bib type) along with recipe cards and placemats. Our promotional

brochures which include recipes as well are in reasonable supply but if we get a few large orders they may become limited as well.

The popular biodegradable poly bags have been ordered and I am expecting them to be in any day now. Last year we sold over 300 cases. They are expensive to ship so we will try again to make them available at several locations across the province.

OBGA promotional items can be viewed on the OBGA website www.ontarioberries.com in the Grower/Member section

OBGA Research Priorities

Below are the research priorities that have been developed over the past few years. Each year the Research Committee updates the priorities based on any new emerging issues and changes in needs of the industry. Please let the board know if you feel we have missed any important industry needs.

Short Term Priorities

1. Insect and Disease

Management – Berry growers are faced with several challenging insect and disease pests that have a serious impact on the economic viability of growing berries.

- a. **Virus Complex** – three virus diseases have become common on Ontario berry farms. When a strawberry plant acquires two or more of these viruses the plant loses vigour and

production crashes and plants need to be removed. The Strawberry aphid is the vector for these viruses and new management products are needed to control this pest

b. **Spotted Wing**

Drosophila – this pest has become common in all berry growing areas of Ontario. Few products are registered for controlling this pest and emergency registrations have been used for the past 3 years to combat this pest. Products with short harvest intervals are needed and more research is required to better manage this invasive species.

- c. **Anthracnose** – berry growers only have one registered fungicide for this disease and there is concern that resistance may be developing.

Research to find resistant varieties and the registration of effective fungicides is needed.

d. **Western Flower Thrips**

– this pest has become very serious as there are few to no effective control products. The use of biological control is not an effective option as the insecticide products used to control other insect pests such as spotted wing drosophila are

damaging to the beneficial insects. Bio control is also very expensive in a field situation.

2. Product Quality and Marketing

- It is critical to continue to develop and expand the trend of buying local. The “Buy Local” movement will be critical for the success of both on farm marketers as well as wholesale producers. Product quality at the wholesale level may be the most limiting factor to the expansion of the Ontario berry industry. Ontario growers need to supply quality fruit that stands the rigors of the wholesale marketing chain. Determining the most cost effective method of storing and preserving quality of fresh berries utilizing modified atmosphere technology and any other storage technologies for all the major berry crops is needed. This can also include the development of more environmentally acceptable packaging as well as breeding cultivars that are suitable to Ontario conditions and meet the needs of the wholesale marketing system.

3. Soil Borne Diseases and Virus

- Berry growers have seen decline in berry plantings. Soil borne diseases including black root rot in strawberries and nematodes on many crops have caused this decline historically. Currently growers have to depend on fumigation to manage the complex of soil diseases.

Fumigants are expensive and several formulations have or are being phased out of production in Canada. Further research is required to find tools to manage soil borne diseases. It is critical that berry growers can purchase clean disease free nursery plants and thus Canadian nurseries require the tools needed to supply these clean plants



4. **Weed Management** - The cost of weed control is a major cost to berry growers. Expanding the potential uses of newly registered products such as Chateau and expanding the label to other berry crops could help reduce grower's costs and increase efficiency. Alternate weed management tools should be evaluated and utilized if they meet grower's needs and fit into growers production systems.

Costs have increased with the change in minimum wage and the need to hand weed. We

cannot adapt to new growing systems without the needed tools and the research knowledge to utilize them in an efficient cost effective manner.

Long Term Priorities

- 1. Breeding and Evaluating New Cultivars** – For the future of young growers there is a need for the development of varieties suited to Ontario conditions. This can be accomplished by plant breeding in Ontario as well as evaluation of new cultivars developed in jurisdictions outside of the province. Research evaluations need to be done in different areas of the province as many climates exist throughout the province. Continue to breed and evaluate new strawberry cultivars that the industry has invested research dollars and time.

Growers need to have knowledge of berry performance before investing in varieties that may not be suited to our conditions. Improved cultivars and better understanding of management could lead to expansion of the industry and increased profitability for growers as well as increased tax dollars with an expanded industry.

- 2. Production Efficiency** – Labour costs are the greatest single cost in the production and marketing of berries. Research is required to develop systems to increase efficiencies of labour in growing and harvesting berry crops. Efficiencies may come from

improved cultivars as well as new production systems.

- 3. Pest Management Products** – There continues to be a loss of older broad spectrum pest control products. For long term viability of the berry industry it is critical that these products be replaced with effective materials. Resistance management is a real concern where in some cases growers are limited to one or two products to control pests which lead to no opportunity of rotation to preserve the efficacy of these products.

There is a need to continue to register new products and to harmonize these registrations with the US to ensure we do not continue to be at a competitive disadvantage.



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4. **Irrigation/Fertigation** – There is a need to develop recommendations to utilize optimum fertilizer and irrigation amounts including irrigation scheduling based on plant need. New production systems including day neutral strawberries and fall bearing raspberries do not have any local based research to make fertility and irrigation decisions. This issue has both a potential economic impact and environmental impact if excess fertilizers are used and production issues if we are not meeting our optimum production.

Growers will continue to guess at fertilizer and watering needs. We will use recommendations from other jurisdictions which may be in excess or deficient of the plants needs

A Local Board for Ontario Berry Growers

The board of directors continue to work on this initiative and hopefully a proposal will be ready soon. We have learned that we cannot charge on plants purchased as this is not allowed by the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission.

The more common approach is to charge an acreage fee. I have been told many years ago the OBGA did charge an acreage fee but the difference this time is that all berry growers will be charged the fee. Presently strawberry growers pay a check-off on plants purchased. This fee would be phased out and selected berry crops would pay an acreage fee. There is more to accomplish and any plan would have to be approved by the Farm Products

marketing Commission before it can be sent out to the grower community.

If you have any questions feel free to contact one of your board members.

OBGA Website

Now is a good time to have a look at the OBGA website and find your farm listing. There are a number of things to review including the map that suggests where your farm is and of course you want to make sure that all your crops are listed.

The website has a feature that searches by crop so you want to make sure that everything is listed correctly so consumers can find you.

Empty seed bag and pesticide bag pilot program returns to Ontario

Farmers in select regions of southwestern Ontario are being offered new options to manage their empty seed and pesticide bags this year. CleanFARMS will be operating an extended pilot project to collect and safely dispose of empty bags, at no cost to participating farmers.

CleanFARMS will collect, transport and ensure collected bags are safely converted to energy at facilities that have extensive emission controls and meet all necessary provincial and federal approvals. Farmers can contribute to a clean and healthy environment by ensuring that empty seed and pesticide bags end up in the right place.

WHEN

May to September 2014

COLLECTION SITES

Collection sites will be located at participating retailers in southwestern Ontario. A list of participating retail collection sites can be found at CleanFARMS.ca.

WHAT

- Empty pesticide bags: multi-walled paper, plastic and aluminum
- Empty seed bags: multi-walled paper and polywoven plastic

HOW TO RETURN BAGS:

1. Obtain free collection bags from select agricultural retailers.
2. Ensure that your seed or pesticide bags are empty.
3. Place the empty bags in the collection bag.
4. Return your full, tied bags to a participating retailer. Bags will be accepted free of charge and sent for safe disposal.

New resource connects Ontario growers to the information they need

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Rural Affairs (OMAF and MRA) have developed a new online tool that helps produce growers understand the regulations and requirements to bring their foods of plant origin to market. Whether they are selling at the farm gate, to local farmers' markets or retailers, this tool, *Marketing Foods of Plant Origin in Ontario: A Guide to Legislative Requirements*, connects producers to the food safety, labelling and packaging requirements for their region.

Producers in the Northern Ontario region were facing a challenge to understanding how they could offer their locally-grown fruits, vegetables and other foods of plant origin through a variety of channels in their community. Regulations that influence the sale of these products can be from the federal or provincial government as well as the local health unit. Knowing where to go to get the right information was daunting.

The new tool allows growers to go online and answer a series of questions, the answers to which allow them to offer their products while complying with appropriate rules and regulations. Questions include what is being sold, if any minimal processing is required before going to market, where the items are being sold and so on.

Links to the correct information from various sources are then provided (as applicable). These links indicate the regulation that is in place, and can relate to packaging, food labelling or processing.

While initiated due to a need identified by growers in Northern Ontario, this tool is available online to all Ontario producers of foods of plant origin. To use the tool online visit ontario.ca/producesafety

Growers who do not have access to the web-version may contact the Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 for alternate versions.

For more information about *Marketing Foods of Plant Origin in Ontario: A Guide to Legislative Requirements*, please visit ontario.ca/producesafety.