PEI WILD BLUEBERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

Check out our brand new logo! →

Fall/ Winter Newsletter December 2014

A message from the President

David MacNearney

I hope the post-harvest season finds everyone healthy and your mowing done. The numbers are in and PEI has reported a large crop of 22 .5 million pounds. Yields elsewhere were also up and the total crop was 100 million pounds above 2013. I'd like to relay to you, the members, what actions your Board is taking and intends to do in the future.

The formidable challenge of marketing all those tasty little treats now falls to the processors, and WABANA to promote them to our foreign markets. I have heard grumblings about the price (and WBANA's performance) from members.

Wyman's has passed on pertinent information in their letter to growers and I presume that Oxford is saying similar things. Our costs keep increasing and we naturally want to see the price paid to us increase to keep pace. The big question is what can we the Association, and member growers, do about it?
The Association is comprised of both processors and growers. Our strategy to date has been to educate ourselves so as to gain insight into how blueberries are priced (both purchase of raw material and sale of processed product) and what other options are available.

- The Association currently subsidizes subscriptions to the Acadia Blueberry Price Report, an independent analysis and commentary of the wild blueberry market, for members.
- The Association co-funded a study to establish baseline costs of production for growers to use for comparison, results of which were presented in workshops in spring 2014.
- The Association is currently contributing to a study of the costs incurred during the purchasing, processing and marketing of wild blueberries and preliminary results will be released at our spring meeting.
- The Association has a sub-committee of Board members that confer with counterparts in the Maritime Provinces about price structure and alternative marketing initiatives.

WBANA Canada is hired as our promotional arm, jointly funded by growers and processors. You, collectively, will send more than $112,500 to WBANA to be used to promote wild blueberries. This is matched by the processors for a total contribution of $225,000. WBANA's purpose is to stimulate demand, in Canada and large foreign markets, so as to reduce negative impacts on price caused by the supply side (our ever increasing crops). WABANA Canada is a very "top-light" organization, with only one full time employee; most of it's funding is spent contracting the services of professional promotional firms. It can be argued that they are doing too good a job as consumer demand in some areas is left unsatisfied due to a lack of consistent, predicable supply. Again, more on this at our spring meeting.

My view is that we are in partnership with the processors. We grow fruit and rely on their processing and marketing expertise to clean, grade, preserve and sell the crop. I don't envy their position. They have to guess what they can afford to pay for our fruit, add their costs to it and try to sell it at a profit. Bumper crops and poor quality make their job harder. We, as growers, are in the unfortunate position of having to trust that they are remitting us a fair portion of whatever they ultimately sell our berries for.

Both the above referenced relationships need trust to thrive and survive. This does not mean that that we don't have to scrutinize their actions and/or evaluate their performance. Personally, I would like the Association to meet with the processors to have a frank discussion as to how they arrive at and justify the offered field price. The Board has also embarked on an examination of the many various selling strategies (including, but not limited to, marketing boards) that level the playing field when competition among buyers is severely limited. Members have addressed the Board over the past number of years requesting that more should be done in collective marketing of fruit, even though this is not a specific mandate of the Association. To this end the Board is gathering information on marketing boards and other options that we will present to the membership at a later date. We will also continue our efforts to educate our members and gaining insight into the processing "black box".

Whats New on the Website?

Have you checked out the PEI Wild Blueberry Grower's website lately? Not only does the website provide fabulous recipes starring wild blueberries and a point of contact for the public to our association, the website also provides members with a copy of our Association bylaws, copies of past newsletters, a detailed database for weed identification, factsheets, the Strategic Plan, videos, and links to additional resources. For more information about the PEIWBGA, check out our website at www.peiwildblueberries.com.
New on our website:

- Full article on Sclerotinia Berry Drop
- 2014 Fall WBANA report
- Rick Mercer's fantastic segment on wild blueberries
- Links to infographics and articles on the health benefits of blueberries.
- Postings on any upcoming events
- A range of recipes for your holiday baking such as blueberry tarts, blueberry cheesecake pie, blueberry crisp and more!

New logo, New Address!

As you may have noticed on the first page, we are proud to unveil our new PEIWBGA logo! We also have a new address, drop in and see us at:

PEIWBGA
420 University avenue, Suite 110
Charlottetown, PE
C1A 7Z5
Phone: 902.368.7289
Fax: 902.368.7204
Email: joann@peifa.ca



Pictured above: Dalhousie Early Pollination Study Researchers. Pierre-Charles Dillon (Field Assistant), Laurel Schut (Graduate student), and

Do you have a 'field shot' to share with the newsletter or on the website? Please forward images to joann@peifa.ca with a caption and photo credit.

Quilt fungicide label expanded to include blueberries

by Press release | Dec 2014

December 3, 2014, Guelph, Ont – Syngenta Canada Inc. recently announced the label expansion of Quilt foliar fungicide to provide blueberry growers across Canada with a new option for control and suppression of a number of diseases affecting production of this crop.

"The expansion of the Quilt fungicide registration to include both lowbush and highbush blueberries is good news for growers looking to address diseases that can negatively affect quality and yield," says Eric Phillips, product lead for fungicides and insecticides with Syngenta Canada. "Lowbush blueberry growers can use it in both the sprout year – to control rust (*Thekopsora minima*) and suppress Septoria and Valdensinia – and in the fruiting year, to control Monilinia blight (*Monilinia vaccinii-corymbosi*) and anthracnose. Growers of highbush blueberries will also find Quilt to be an effective tool in the control of mummy berry and anthracnose."

Quilt fungicide combines two active ingredients, azoxystrobin (Group 11) and propiconazole (Group 3). Together, they deliver both systemic and curative properties, as well as support an effective resistance management strategy. Quilt moves within the plant and is distributed within the leaves, protecting the plant as it grows, not just at the points of contact.

Quilt is available to blueberry growers in case and tote packaging options.

For more information about Quilt fungicide, please contact your local Syngenta representative, visit the Quilt product page on SyngentaFarm.ca or contact the Customer Resource Centre at 1-87-SYNGENTA (1-877-964-3682).

Would you like to learn more about WBANA?

The Wild Blueberry Association of North America (WBANA) are two separate Associations which co-operate on the promotion of wild blueberries in various national and international markets. WBANA does not buy, sell, or market wild blueberries or any specific wild blueberry product. Its mandate is to promote wild blueberries and the health benefits associated therewith.
Tom Matheson, our Board WBANA (Wild Blueberry Association of North America) representative, recently attended the annual joint meeting of WBANA Canada and WBANA US in Quebec City. Read his full report, go to: www.peiwildblueberries.com/fall-2014-wbana-report-tom-matheson/

Marketing Council Meeting

In response to member requests, the PEIWBGA Board will be meeting with Ian McIsaac, Marketing Council Secretary, on January 14th, 2015. The purpose of this meeting is to gather information on various selling strategies, initiatives and options, including marketing boards. If you're a PEIWBGA member who has a particular question for Mr. McIsaac or a topic that you think should be discussed at the meeting, please contact us at (902) 368-7289 or joann@peifa.ca.

Sclerotinia berry drop: a newly recognized blueberry disease

Blueberry growers are frequently confronted common blueberry diseases that can substantially reduce yield, quality and economic returns of the crop. What may come as a surprise to growers is that another destructive but unrecognized disease has been found lurking in blueberry crops in central and eastern Canada and in Scotland.

Learn more at www.peiwildblueberries.com/735/

We want to know what you think: Burning Technology!

We're looking for your feedback! Do you think blueberry producers could benefit from more information on burning? Would you like to see the PEIWBGA commissioning research in the effectiveness of modern, efficient burning technologies? Please let us know via email at joann@peifa.ca or give us a call at (902) 368-7289

Upcoming Events

- PEI Wild Blueberry Growers Association Annual General Meeting: April 9th, 2015
- BNBB Annual General Meeting: Begins with an evening social on April 9th, 2015
- Post-Harvest Management of Fruits and Vegetables: February 20-21, 2015
  (find more information at http://peiwildblueberries.com/post-harvest-management-of-fruits-vegetables/)

Dalhousie graduate student explores the impacts of early season (wild) pollination on harvestable yield in lowbush blueberry

By: Laurel Schut, Dalhousie Graduate Student

In the past few months, you may have seen various pieces of research equipment dotting the blueberry fields across the eastern part of the island. From weather monitoring equipment, to pollinator exclusion tents, to a whole lot of neon pink agricultural flags, one Dalhousie graduate student had her hands full this summer in an attempt to capture potential yield differences between wild and managed pollinators.

As seasoned blueberry growers well know, fruit set is dependent upon cross-pollination activity of insects, mainly bees, and thus the supply of bees is important for security and expansion of the industry. Honey bees play a leading role in pollinating blueberries, but shortages have been common. In this context, understanding the role of wild pollinators is critical.

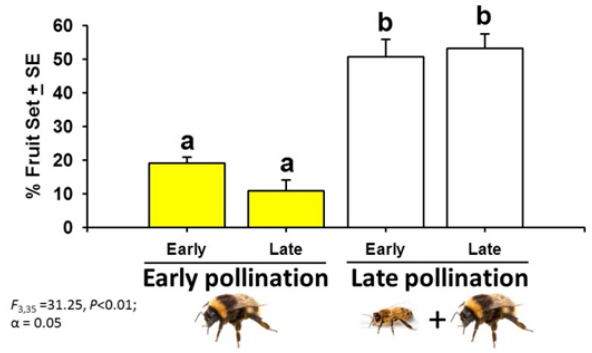
Laurel Schut came to Dalhousie University's School for Resource and Environmental Studies with an intention to research and learn more about how pollinators impact and interact with our agro-industrial food system.

"I came to Dalhousie in the midst of the honey bee crisis," says Schut. "I had been caught in the media's portrayal of mostly doom and gloom, and so I became interested in exploring this issue in a more in-depth way. Much of the attention at that time was focused on only one species of managed honey bee, *Apis mellifera*. Yet there is growing academic evidence that suggests that wild pollinators are comparatively superior pollinators: they have been found to deliver pollen of higher quality and deposit greater quantities of pollen and a faster rate than honey bees. I think that these are really important and hopeful comparative discoveries."

Schut's research aim for her thesis project is to better understand the impacts of early season (wild) pollination flows on final yield quantity and quality.

"Blueberry clones have a wide window for pollination as a result of clonal diversity within the fields," explains Schut. "There are a number of species of wild pollinators in the landscape, but because harvest is driven by an imperative for consistent ripening, large numbers of managed pollinators are used to pollinate in a more synchronistic way…what we wanted to know was whether these management practices result in situations in which a portion of early (wild) pollination flows do not contribute to yield through early ripening and pre-harvest berry drop."

Mid-season blueberry fruit set using pollinator exclusion cages (July 2014)



Schut located her 10 experimental fields across the eastern region of PEI, ranging from Belle River to Hermanville. Using pollinator exclusion cages, early and late flowering blueberry clones were exposed to early (wild) pollination (EP) and late (wild and managed) pollination (LP) flows. Each field had a total of 12 cages of 1m x 1m in size that tested the four different treatments. Within each field, berry formation, ripening and pre-harvest loss within treatments and in adjacent control plots exposed to full season pollination were monitored by repeated counts of berries per stem for 51 tagged stems (3 stems/plot).



"Our preliminary data analysis shows us some interesting and somewhat unexpected results," explains Schut. "Firstly, and as we expected, there is a strong effect of cage exclusion when we compare fruit set between clones exposed to early pollination versus late pollination. Secondly, and this is the more surprising result, is that the clonal effect is minimal: there is some clonal effect, but only for the pollination that takes place before the managed pollinators arrive in the fields, and it's not significant."

Schut had hypothesized that both pollination treatment and clonal diversity would have an effect on yield numbers.

"What I think is most interesting to note from our preliminary findings is that anywhere between 20 to 40% of fruit is being set *before* managed pollinators even arrive in the fields," states Schut. "This speaks to the importance of wild pollinators in the lowbush blueberry industry and, I hope, will prompt more growers to think about, create and conserve wild pollinator habitat."

With the field season now complete, Schut – along with two chest freezers full of berry samples – has returned to Dalhousie's main campus to continue analysing the results. Not only will she be measuring the final quantity of berries that result from EP and LP flows with the yield in control plots, but she will also be looking at differences in berry quality by the use of sugar concentration tests and examining berry size, shape, and colour.

"Field work this summer was an absolute whirlwind. Now that it's done, I'm looking forward to seeing what gems of information can be pulled from the large data set was collected over the past four months."

Laurel Schut can be contacted by email at laurel.schut@dal.ca or by phone at 902-220-6105.

More information can be found at: http://www.dal.ca/faculty/agriculture/extended-learning/programs-courses/learn2farm/wild-pollinator-habitat.html



BLUEBERRY BIO

John Handrahan lives and farms wild blueberries near Tignish PEI, with his wife Sharon. John is a third generation blueberry grower, who grew up in the industry. John became personally involved in farming in 1992, and continues to work with his father Leo on their combined ninety two acres of berry land.

John lived in Toronto for three years and chose to return to Tignish for the life-style that the area and blueberry farming offers. He has volunteered time to the PEI Wild Blueberry Growers Association in several capacities, and currently serves as the Association's treasurer and Research Committee chair. He has been involved in local and provincial co-ops and credit unions, and has been appointed to boards and committees of the province of Prince Edward Island.

John finds the wild blueberry industry interesting and challenging, yet he finds the most interesting part of the wild blueberry industry are the individuals involved; the farmers, researchers and crop specialists who are dedicated to helping to produce healthy, wholesome food.

In each Newsletter we will be sharing a Blueberry Bio with you on an Island Grower, if you would like to submit a bio please e-mail JoAnn Pineau at joann@peifa.ca

Local Producers

If you have a u-pick facility or sell your product locally at farmer's markets, etc please contact us. We are putting together a list of local producers to discuss some local promotion opportunities

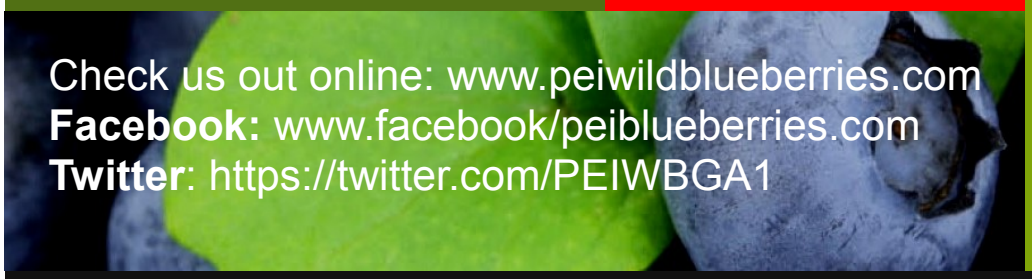
Contact JoAnn 368-7289 or joann@peifa.ca

Christmas Contest

Are you using blueberries in your Christmas baking or cooking? Did you give or receive a blueberry themed present this Christmas? Submit your recipe and/or photos to joann@peifa.ca by January 1st to have your name put in for a draw for a gift basket.







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Submissions & contributions to the newsletter are welcome additions! Please forward ideas/articles/photos/ events to JoAnn Pineau: joann@peifa.ca