

ACORN Berry Network Newsletter

Issue 1 – September 2009

Welcome to the first ACORN Organic Berry Network e-newsletter!

The Organic Berry Network is a three-year project that was started in the Fall of 2008, thanks to funding from the New Brunswick Agricultural Council, PEI ADAPT Council, and Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada. The goal of the Network is to assist the organic industry in Atlantic Canada to access information on organic marketing, production and research, as well as new market opportunities.

In this issue:

- **Research & Innovation:** find out about PEI's emerging organic blackcurrant scene
- **Events:** mark your calendars for upcoming events and catch up on what's already taken place at Berry Network workshops
- **Classifieds:** for berry producers needs and wants
- **Online Resources:** a collection of useful websites that may be of interest to you

Research & Innovation:

Organic Diversification in Anne's Land: Blackcurrants are 'It'

An exciting new marketing initiative has started in PEI: a growing number of organic producers have diversified into blackcurrant production and are working together to develop direct marketing avenues for their crop – mainly for export to Japan, where high quality product and organic certification go a long way. According to Jeff Gallant of Shepherd's Farm in Pisquid, PEI, the special cultural relationship between PEI and Japan translates into a huge marketing advantage for Island organics. PEI is well-known in Japan because of Anne of Green Gables and its' image of having a clean and wholesome rural environment fits well with marketing organic products. There are over 40 acres of blackcurrant plantations in PEI, and a large majority of them (about 90-95%) are certified

organic or in transition. Raymond Loo, a long time organic farmer, has actively promoted black current cultivation and traveled all over the world to blackcurrant plantations. He has been successful in convincing other farmers to take the plunge; a group of about 20 producers meets on a regular basis to share their knowledge of what works well and what doesn't for organic blackcurrant cultivation.

One of the biggest challenges with blackcurrants is that they are time-consuming to harvest since they have to be de-stemmed. Stephen Cousins, who owns Shepherd's Farm and has about 2 acres in organic blackcurrants, purchased a mechanical harvester this summer and plans on using it to harvest berries for a number of producers as well as his own once the bushes are high enough and the berries aren't too low on the plant (they need to be at least 6 inches from the ground). A processing line will be set up next year, and producers are hoping that the yield will be high enough to send over their first shipment to Japan.

In conjunction with the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC) and the PEI Department of Agriculture, four blackcurrant producers from across PEI are testing methods that are suitable for organic production. Frank Whitty of Farmington, Ron Walsh and Gary Renkema of Hunter River, and Stephen Cousins of Pisquid are interested in developing the best organic cultivation methods for 'Titania' and 'Ben Hope' blackcurrant cultivars. The goal of this multi-year research project is to increase bush size and berry yield for mechanical harvesting by investigating fertility rates on first year and second year plantings using a mixture of composted chicken manure and crab meal. Split nitrogen applications are being tested to determine if spring or fall applications will improve plant growth, or if only one fertility application is required. The use of fish fertilizer as a micronutrient provider is also being explored for blackcurrant production. The research is also focused on providing weed control through the use of landscape fabric. The effect of these treatments on plant growth and yield will determine their success, since larger plants will result in fruit being higher on the bush, which in turn makes it more feasible for mechanical harvesting. Also, since bushes tend to be smaller in organic production compared to conventional, split nitrogen applications may make a difference for plant growth and nutrient uptake. Blackcurrants are heavy nitrogen feeders, so the trick will be to supply enough nutrient for high yields and vigorous plant growth without producing a nice crop of weeds that will compete for nitrogen.

There is a lot of optimism on both the part of growers and researchers that this will be a worthwhile new addition to the roster of organic crops grown on PEI. If you would like more information about the OACC research project or to get in touch with PEI blackcurrant producers, please contact Joanna MacKenzie (jmackenzie@nsac.ca) at 902-896-2469 or Karen Nelson (knelson@nsac.ca).

Events:

So far, ACORN's Organic Berry Network has hosted 4 events. If you weren't able to attend these workshops, you can access most of the presentations on the ACORN Berry Network website (www.acornorganic.org/berry.html), or by viewing the links below:

- Sustainable Pollination Forum in PEI (June, 2009)
 - o Sustainable Pollination Project Details by Dr. Jim Kemp, UPEI
 - o The Influence of Landscape and Field Characteristics on Native Pollinators in Wild Blueberries by Pamela Craig
 - o The Role of Mycorrhizal Inoculants in Agriculture by Dr. John Sutton
 - o The Relationship Between Native Bee Abundance and Landscape Pattern by Steve Javorek
 - o The Role of Pollinators in Fruit and Berry Production by keynote speaker Dr. Peter Kevan
 - o The Importance of Native Pollinators in Canada by Cory Sheffield
 - o Atlantic Pollination Research at NSAC by Chris Cutler

- Organic Small Fruit Workshop on Strawberries, Raspberries, and Highbush Blueberries in Memramcook, NB (March, 2009)
 - o Workshop Introduction
 - o Site Selection by Roger Tremblay
 - o Site Preparation by Dr. Claude Bethelme
 - o Raspberry Production
 - o Strawberry Production by Richard Brown of Mountindale Farm (Text):

- [Strawberry Production by Richard Brown of Mountindale Farm \(Pictures\)](#)
- [Highbush Blueberry Production by Rupert Jannasch](#)
- [Organic Berry Research Presentations at the ACORN Conference in Truro, NS \(February, 2009\)](#)
 - [Pollination for Berry Production by Dr. Peter Kevan of CANPOLIN](#)
 - [PEI Pollination Project by Dr. Jim Kemp](#)
 - [Soil Foodweb for Berry Production: Manage your soils with compost and compost teas/extracts](#)
 - [Evaluation of Compost Teas for Disease Management of Wild Blueberries in NS](#)
 - [Using Mulch in Highbush Blueberries: Benefits for Management of Blueberry Maggot](#)
 - [Micro-Fungus Clonostchys Rosea: A versatile organic tool for promoting the growth, health and productivity of crops](#)
- [Organic Cranberry workshop in Richibucto, NB \(June, 2008\)](#)
 - [Site Selection \(English\) / Sélection d'un site \(Français\)](#)
 - [Water Management \(English\) / Gestion de L'eau \(Français\)](#)
 - [Organic Fertilization \(English\) / Fertilisation d'établissement \(Français\)](#)

Upcoming events:

October 5-6, 2009 – Practical Pollinator Conservation Conference at the Hotel Gouverneur, Place Dupuis in Montreal, QC. Details found at: http://www.seeds.ca/conference/CPPI_0910_agenda.pdf

March 4, 2010 - Organic Berry Symposium at the Rodd Charlottetown, PEI. Details coming soon at <http://acornorganic.org/berry.html>

Classifieds:

To facilitate the exchange of information and resources, the e-newsletter will also feature a classifieds section. To send in announcements, items for sale, wanted items, etc. for the next newsletter, please e-mail admin@acornorganic.org.

Current Listings:

- I am from Ontario and looking for a source of certified organic raspberry plants in any form (cane, bare root, sprouts) within Canada. I am hoping for Everlasting or similar, 500 plants to start. Please contact Gerry Stephenson of Drumlin Farm at drumlinfarm@xplornet.ca

Online Resources:

The US organization, ATTRA (National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service), has published a number of useful organic production guides:

Strawberries: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/strawberry.pdf>

Grapes: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/grapes.pdf>

Bramble fruits: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/bramble.pdf>

Blueberries: <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/blueberry.pdf>

Forms to help growers keep an activity log for their organic certification (may be useful

as templates): <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/orchardforms.pdf>

The Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (oacc.info), located on the campus of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College in Truro, has a good amount of production information on its website. Click on the links below to access the articles, or visit http://oacc.info/Extension/hort_fruits.asp:

Strawberries:

- [Reducing Herbicides in Strawberries by Exploring Alternative Production Systems 2009](#)
- [Growing an Organic Strawberry](#)
- [Organic Strawberries and Pests](#)

Cranberries:

- [Entrust Insect Control Products Granted Minor Use Registrations for Cranberries](#)

Blueberries:

- [Organic Wild Lowbush Blueberry Guide](#)
- [Fertility and Weed Management in Organic Highbush Blueberry Production](#)

And of course, have a look at the wealth of information available in the [Organic Path](#) and [Grower Database](#) sections of the ACORN website (www.acornorganic.org/index.html)

On a different note, there is a group of anti-pesticide advocates in California fighting the approval of Methyl Iodide use in strawberry production. For more info or to sign their petition, go to <http://www.panna.org/fumigants/mei> or <http://www.pesticidereform.org>.

If anyone you know would like to sign up for future issues of ACORN's Organic Berry Network e-newsletter, please have them send an e-mail to admin@acornorganic.org.