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Agricultural Partnership**

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# Nabuurs Gardens Expansion

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in the green*



**Canada**

## Processing plant gives brothers more time to profit from the fruits of their labour

In 2023, high school culinary teacher Terry Nabuurs and brother Ben, a registered nurse, were happy farming on the side with Ben's eight acres of pear trees and 70 acres of wild blueberries shared between them.

But when relatives decided to sell the Nabuurs Gardens Farm Market and Garden Centre in Montague after more than 30 years in business, the brothers jumped at the opportunity to expand into another seasonal business.

Now they are wasting little time expanding again, this time focusing on building a year-round operation with value-added products, and opportunities for full-time, year-round employment.

This time, the catalyst for expansion is a new processing plant in Albion Cross. Inside, project lead Calvin Harris of East Arc Metalworks is putting the finishing touches setting up a cleaning and freezing line and frozen cold storage unit.

Terry says the plant will be a game-changer when it comes to marketing their fruit.

"When we combine the blueberry acreage our parents have, the strawberry fields that came with the garden centre, and the new fields of raspberries we planted, our family grows more fruit than we can sell out of the Farm Market in a matter of three or four weeks," says Terry. "That's a short window."

**“ We will be able to try some different packaging sizes for different markets. ”**

- Terry Nabuurs

"But with the ability to clean, freeze and store the crop in our processing plant, we can spend those three weeks concentrating on the harvest and then use the rest of the year to add value to our crop."



Terry Nabuurs, left, and construction lead Calvin Harris in a new processing facility being built in Albion Cross with federal and provincial government support from the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

Terry and his brother Ben say the ability to freeze and store their fruit production in the new plant will help them diversify into new products and expand their seasonal business into a year-round enterprise.

The goal, he says, is to build a sustainable, year-round business.

In its first full year in operation, the brothers intend to use the plant to freeze and process their blueberries and raspberries, adding more types of fruit in the future to the processing line as the business grows.

Nabuurs Gardens is constructing the new processing plant with support from with support from the federal-provincial Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP). The brothers also turned to the Sustainable CAP's Perennial Crop Development Program to help expand into raspberry and high-bush blueberry production.

Terry says the value of that support was more than financial.

"The application process helped us focus on our business plan and allowed us time to hash out the details and stress-test some of the weaknesses of our plan," says Terry.

Their current Farm Market retail outlet already offers some value-added products like fruit preserves, purees and pies, and the business uses a third party to freeze 30-pound boxes of blueberries.

Terry says the ability to freeze and store the harvest will allow them to develop more products in-house.

“We will be able to try some different packaging sizes for different markets,” says Terry. “And we think we can do a lot more with pies, selling them beyond the store.”

The plan is to create more work to justify full-time, year-round jobs at the garden centre and store, which are currently open from May to October.

“It comes down to cash flow,” says Terry. “The age-old challenge for farmers is finding creative ways to generate steady year-round revenues from your crop.”

“Our goal is to gradually move away from a seasonally focused operation, and spread our work,

sales and expenses out over the entire year. We would like to be in a position to hire more year-round staff rather than hiring a crew to harvest for a few weeks or having seasonal staff for a few months.”

The brothers will continue to run the flower and plant business at Nabuurs Gardens. Terry admits the expansion is a big step.

“It’s definitely a risk but I would say we feel cautiously optimistic,” he says. “Farmers generally don’t let the fear of risk hold them back.”

“We keep reminding ourselves that everyone has to eat. As long as we continue to produce good quality, healthy food in a sustainable manner, we believe there will be demand for that.”



Terry and Ben Nabuurs bought the Nabuurs Gardens Farm Market and Garden Centre in Montague in 2023.