



**Sustainable Canadian
Agricultural Partnership**

Competitive. Innovative. Resilient.

Gerard Morrison

*Helping keep farms
in the green*



Canada

The future is sunny for Launching highbush blueberry farm

Four years ago, Gerard Morrison super-charged the growth of his new highbush blueberry operation in Launching, PEI, when he plugged into the sun.

The connection, courtesy of six solar panels powering his custom-built irrigation and fertilization system, allowed him to boost production at The Blueberry Orchard with enough water pressure to quench six acres of berries while still conserving water.

“The system is helping to grow the quantity of berries we need to be a self-supporting small family business, and it is producing the high quality we want our name associated with,” says Morrison. “We can’t compete with the bigger guys on price at the commercial level, but we can compete on quality.”

His customers agree. Morrison says the popularity of his berries continues to grow through word of mouth and glowing reviews on social media.

A third of the business is U-pick, and the rest is sold to local markets and stores.

“When people tell you what beautiful berries you have and how much they enjoy coming out to pick them, that’s a great feeling,” says Morrison.



Gerard Morrison used a local design consultant and plumber to build the solar-powered irrigation system that has super-charged the growth of his Launching, PEI, highbush blueberry operation.



Gerard Morrison with some of his berries at The Blueberry Orchard, the six-acre highbush blueberry farm he built from scratch with help from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership and the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

It’s a long way from 2015 when Gerard and his wife Susan came up with the idea for starting The Blueberry Orchard as something to do in retirement.

“I knew someone who was growing highbush blueberries and I thought I might have the right kind of land to grow them,” says Morrison. “I found a spot where the soil pH was ideal and the sloping land would be great for drainage.”

The fields were family farmland that had been dormant for 60 years and reclaimed by trees. After spending two summers clearing the trees with his son, Morrison turned to the federal and provincial governments for financial support to get the fields into production, first through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership and then its successor, the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

With partial funding from the Perennial Crop Development Program, Morrison was able to increase the number of two-year-old shrubs he was planting each year, the first step in a production cycle that sees the blueberries ready for picking by year five.

Morrison was also able to tap into funding for supplies to help with the cost of designing and setting up his solar-powered irrigation system.

“There is no question that this government support allowed me to expand and establish the fields much sooner than I could have done just on my own,” he says. “When I might have been planting only one acre, I was planting two.”

Morrison says the ability to get on a commercial footing sooner reduced his risk.

The funding also helped him innovate when it came to irrigation.

With his fields located too far from the power grid for conventionally powered irrigation, Morrison knew solar was the answer.

“Developing the solar system was a bit of struggle,” he admits. “I had the idea but it took three years to find someone to help me design it.”

The problem was pressure. While a solar-powered house might need enough pressure to move nine gallons of water a minute, Morrison’s fields needed 25.

He finally found a design consultant, and a local plumber helped him build the irrigation system.

The system divides the fields into one-acre zones, and feeder lines can be turned on for only the zones or single rows needing water.

“The system allows us to conserve water, sending it only where it is needed,” says Morrison. “We have 11 varieties of highbush blueberries, so we can tailor the amount of water to their individual growth needs.

“The beauty of the system is that I can also run liquid fertilizer through it with the same kind of control.”

With Morrison’s sixth acre of blueberries planted and ready for production in three years, he says The Blueberry Orchard will be the perfect size, just in time for his retirement as a transportation manager and the full-time launch of his new career.

“I wanted something that my wife Susan and I could run with the part-time help of a family friend,” he says. “And I wanted something where I was continually learning”.

“We have that now.”



Gerard Morrison’s custom-built solar-powered irrigation and fertilization system has not only increased the volume and quality of his highbush blueberries, but also conserves water by directing it only where and when it is needed.