



ADAM'S
BERRY FARM

PICK YOUR OWN & FARMSTAND

— **ADAMSBERRYFARM.COM** —
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The logo is contained within a white, irregularly shaped border that resembles a berry basket. At the top right, there is a circular seal with the text "VERMONT CERTIFIED ORGANIC" and a central emblem. Below the main title, there are four vertical dotted lines extending downwards to the fruit illustrations. The fruit illustrations include one strawberry, three blueberries, and three raspberries.

ADAM'S BERRY FARM

Charlotte, VT



We've been operating for 23 years

- 2001: We started the farm with 300 plants in Lincoln
- 2002: we moved to the Intervale and leased 10 acres
 - At the end of our time there, we had 5,000 blueberries

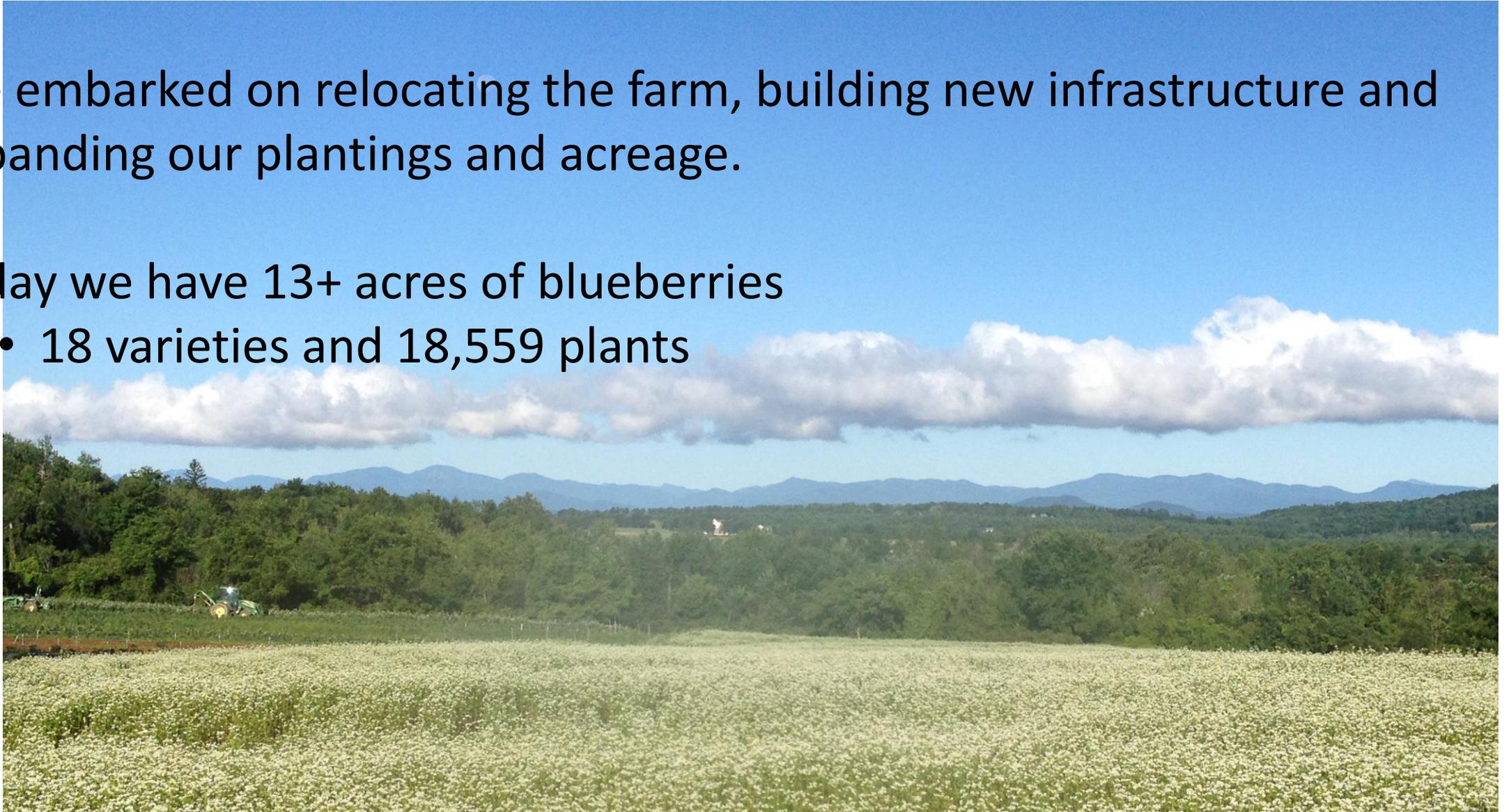


In 2012 with the help of the Vermont Land Trust and the Farmland Access Program we purchased 57 acres in Charlotte, VT just south of Burlington

We embarked on relocating the farm, building new infrastructure and expanding our plantings and acreage.

Today we have 13+ acres of blueberries

- 18 varieties and 18,559 plants



We are Certified Organic and Real Organic

Diverse market outlets: wholesale, farmstand, farmers market, PYO, CSA berry share, value added products



WHAT WE GROW:

- **3 acres of June strawberries**
 - **2 acres of day neutral strawberries** (most of which are under low tunnels)
 - **1 acre of high tunnel raspberries** (mix of summer and fall)
 - **1 acre of field raspberries** (summer, primarily for PYO and mechanical harvest)
 - **13+ acres of blueberries** (18 varieties)
 - **Pick your own flowers**
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- A close-up photograph of fresh berries including strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries on a white surface. The strawberries are bright red with green leaves, the blueberries are dark blue with a white bloom, and the raspberries are bright red. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green grass and a wooden fence.

During this session we will cover a variety of topics that have aided in our growth (progression) over the last 23 years of growing blueberries.

Including how we have worked to scale up aspects of our business, increase efficiencies and reduce labor



Planting/establishment efficiencies

SPACING

- 10ft - 11ft between rows with 3 feet between bushes
- 1452 plants per acre vs 1089 plants per acre with 4ft
- Wise use of land (fixed asset). More plants per acre
- * consider the width of your equipment, most importantly if your tractors will fit down your rows.

WEED MAT

- Landscape fabric to minimize hand labor (weeding). Also helps with SWD and Mummy berry.
- Add organic matter pre planting and through opening annually.

INNER ROW PLANTING

- Established a low mow fescue, clumping grass vs rhizome. Does not compete with blueberries shallow fine root system.
- Minimizes mower time and fuel usage
- Minimal disturbance of pollinators and developing flowers and fruit



PRUNING

- A labor intensive and time consuming part of the farm
 - But if done properly has many benefits that can save you money
- We budget 20+ hours per acre
 - This is with mechanical pruners, considerably more without
- We look at pruning as an annual investment



Why Prune Annually?

Fruit Size and Fruit Balance

- Pruning creates larger fruit that ripens more evenly

Harvest Efficiency and Ease

- For crew and pick your own happiness.
- Prune so the bush is upright, eliminate low hard to harvest fruit.
- For ease of equipment (mower, harvester)

Health of the Plants

- For airflow and to reduce prevalence of disease
- Remove dead, diseased and crossed wood!

Longevity of Planting

- Most productive canes are from 3-6 years old



EFFICIENCIES/STRATEGIES FOR PRUNING

- Create triage list
 - we aim to prune every bush every year but weather can present a challenge
- Consider Electric/ battery pruners
 - Clean cuts, minimizes exhaustion, no carpal tunnel syndrome
- Get to know what each variety needs when it comes to pruning – each variety has its own specific pruning needs
 - Jessica and I do all the pruning for the farm and have found it most efficient if we are each responsible for different varieties as each variety has its own unique pruning requirements
 - Allows us to develop a 2-3 year pruning plan for each of our individual varieties.



Modern Blueberry Varieties

- Larger yields: 10 +lbs/bush vs 6/lbs bush
 - 14,500lbs per acre vs 8,600 lbs per acre
- Large berries = Faster Harvest (reduced labor and happy employees)
- Upright growth and clustered berries also allow for faster harvest
- concentrated ripening periods assist in coordinating labor needs (2-3 picks)
- long shelf life and cold storage capabilities (4 weeks vs 7 days)



Modern Blueberry Varieties

- New varieties have thicker skin and longer shelf life.
 - Less susceptible to insect pressure (SWD)
 - Fruit stands up in wet conditions (noticeable difference this season)
- Customers preferences are for larger and firmer fruit
- We have planted 7 newer varieties over the last few of years
 - Pleased with Draper, Top Shelf and Aurora
- Can be mechanically harvested: frozen market and end of season clean up
 - Gives us then option to shift business/sales outlets if needed
 - Gives us the option to lean on our mechanical harvester during labor crunches and heat waves where everything ripens at once



Labor as your largest expense



- Blueberries are labor intensive!!!!
- 600+ hours to harvest 1 acre
- Ideally 3-4 picks and a clean up pick
- Accomplished with crew of 10-15 people
- We harvest daily for at least 6 hours



Harvest efficiencies to address labor costs

- Proper pruning:
- Ensure proper irrigation to allow fruit to size up: bigger berries = faster harvest
 - 1 to 2 inches per week
- Modern varieties
- Hip buckets so both hands are free and moving
- Hand vs Mechanical.
 - EC Pick and Korvan 930 tow behind harvester.
 - Speed, thoroughness.
 - Late season clean up
 - Maximize return per acre



INVESTING IN A MECHANICAL HARVESTER

In 2020 we invested in a mechanical harvester with the goal of reducing our labor hours for harvesting

- Clean pick allowing us to mitigate the spread of disease which is essential as an organic grower
- Allows us to harvest a high percentage of the fruit set
 - essential with a labor intensive, high value crop
- Not a fresh pick harvest
 - Freezer quality. Useful for
 - Useful for value added products and to sell to breweries and jam makers
- Massive labor savings



Mechanical Harvester for Security

- Ensures we will be able to harvest our crop
- During slow PYO weeks or when our crew can't maintain the harvest
- Heat waves/ climate change
- With the mechanical harvester, we can harvest before we lose berries
 - have them for our frozen berry line and value added products
- Clean up harvest: pick the bushes clean, to help stop spread of disease
 - 16 human Hours vs 10 Minutes mechanical harvester (200 ft row)



Mechanical
Harvester
Korvan 930



Mechanical Harvester Korvan 930



INVESTING IN A SORTING AND PACKING LINE

In 2020, with WLEB grant we purchased a:

- blower cleaner to remove stems and leaves
- sorting table to pick out green, soft and bruised fruit
- clamshell filler to expedite packing process.

For reference and scale, the clamshell filler can fill 90 pints per minute

- 10x faster than a person doing it by hand
- we typically distribute 1000 - 1200 pints per day

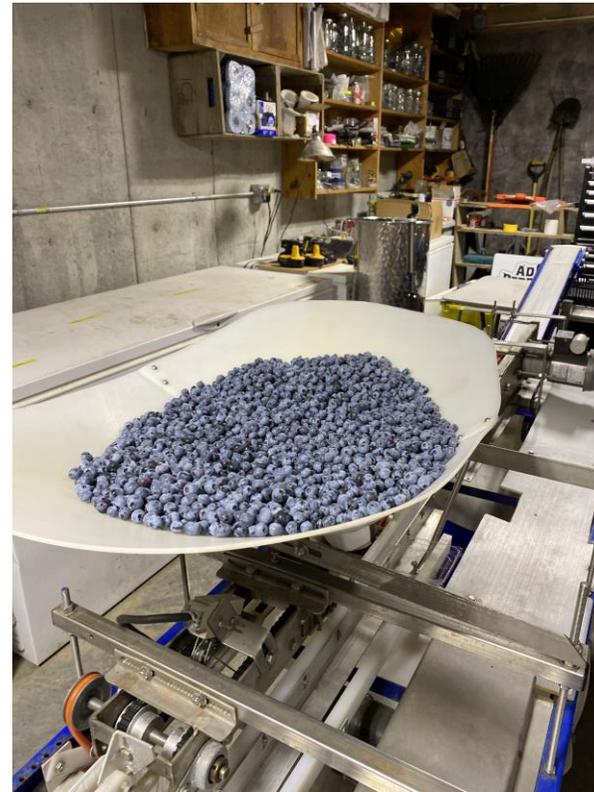
Some math

- On average we harvest 1,000 lbs per day (100 trays, enough to fill 1,200 pints)
- Packing Line: 1200 pints at 90 pints per minute, packing will take 15-20 minutes
- Packing by hand: take 1 person 5+ hours (if we are lucky)



SORTING AND PACKING LINE

- This has speed up our packing time and freed up labor
- It has increased quality of our product
- It has allowed us to efficiently handle a large influx of fruit in a timely manner
- And it is fun! it moves at a rapid pace and gets your adrenaline moving.



Sorting
line



Packing
with the
clamshell filler



QUESTIONS?

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