



2017 FINALIST

Environmental Farm Plan Stewardship Award

Haskap Hill Farm Incorporated, owned and operated by Mark and Deborah Geck, is located in Durham Pictou County. This 25 acre farm, purchased by the Geck's in 2014, is dedicated to the safe, environmentally friendly, organic production of haskap berries.



It is evident immediately upon visiting the farm that environmental considerations are a primary driver for the farm business. The photovoltaic panels installed on top of the farm building supply all the electrical requirements, allowing the farm to be "off-grid". The farm is investigating ways to cool the haskap berries after harvest, which will require minimal increases in their power needs.

After purchasing the property, the Geck's knew that drainage was going to be a problem on the farm. Existing ditches have been cleaned out, subsurface tile drains have been repaired and French drains have been installed. This work has improved field drainage and helped reduce the amount of runoff and erosion within the fields.

Fertility management and soil health is another priority on the farm. Soil amendment rates are based on soil fertility tests. Fertility requirements for the haskap are not as well-known as other crops grown in Nova Scotia. Because of that, the farm is participating in a haskap fertility research project with Dalhousie and Perennia. Organic soil amendments and plant supplements are either land applied or sprayed as a compost tea. The compost teas also help protect the plants against disease. The farm uses a cover crop of white clover between rows, which provides soil coverage, increases soil nitrogen levels, decreases weed growth and provides food for honey bees. The farm also has used Daikon radish in the rows prior to planting to help break up compaction and prepare the soil. No herbicides are used on the farm. The farm has used a mixture of manual and mechanical weeding but the removal of weed roots and organic matter from the mechanical weeding left the soil around the haskap plants more susceptible to frost

heave and erosion. For this reason, the farm switched to the use of raised beds and permeable barrier cloth to suppress weeds and to provide soil coverage around the plants.



Biodiversity and wildlife habitat are important components of the farm. In addition to the clover cover crop, native flowers are encouraged to support pollinators. Mason bee nesting blocks have been constructed and installed along the perimeter fence. The design of the perimeter fence was chosen to protect the crop but to also prevent wildlife from becoming entangled. Where the fence line was cleared, debris piles were left to create wildlife habitat.



The efforts that Mark, Deborah and Haskap Hill Farm have made to reduce their environmental impact have made them one of three finalists for this year's Environmental Farm Plan Stewardship Award. The award is an initiative of the Environmental Farm Plan Program created through a partnership of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Nova Scotia Environmental Farm Plan and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.

The award recognizes producers who make land, water and habitat stewardship a significant part of their farm operations. To be eligible for the award, farmers must have a current environmental farm plan. The voluntary plan helps them identify, assess, and reduce environmental risk on their farms. Since the program's inception in 1999, more than 1,800 farmers have developed Environmental Farm Plans for their operations.

The Environmental Farm Plan Program is supported under *Growing Forward 2*, a five-year agricultural agreement between the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia.
