

A Berry Determined Sturgeon County Farmer

Rosy Farms Leads the Way in Regenerative Agriculture

It's easy to see why Andrew Rosychuk is bursting with berry pride as he guides visitors around his organic haskap farm in Sturgeon County.

This summer, more than 4,000 people travelled from across the province to pick more than 11,500 pounds of the juicy haskap berries on his U-pick farm, Rosy Farms.

Haskaps are an oblong berry originating in Japan and Russia that blend the taste of raspberries and blueberries into a tart, intense flavour.

It took time and patience for Rosychuk, recently honoured with a Sturgeon County Excellence in Agricultural Award, to produce a berry yield like that.

Eleven years ago, Rosychuk purchased 76 acres of farmland just northeast of Alcomdale. The poor soil, known as Alcomdale Gumbo, has high salt and compaction levels, a challenge for farmers.

"It's what I could afford at the time," recalls Rosychuk. He was intrigued by the berry's antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

"I thought I was smarter than Mother Nature," he jokes, noting he holds a Production Horticulture Diploma from Olds College of Agriculture and Technology.

He poured his heart and soul into the farm, along with savings from his work as a Red Seal welder and boilermaker in Alberta's oil patch. He was determined to enrich and restore the health of the soil.

In between contracts, Rosychuk improved the soil by planting a cover crop of alfalfa, daikon radish, fescues, and clovers to add carbon, the building block of nutrient rich soil.

"I'm working with the biology to put more back into the system instead of taking out," he explains as several Canada geese gather nearby in a wetlands area he created south of his orchard.

The wetlands and soil improvements help the berry crop thrive.

"You let the mice come in and they can dig holes for the bumblebees. The bumblebees pollinate, and then you get more seeds of what you want."

He gradually added about 37,000 haskap bushes of different varieties, expanding his orchard each year with support from his tradesman wages.

His grit and determination have paid off. The Sturgeon County award recognizes his efforts in agricultural production, community support, and innovation.

A founding member of the Haskap Alberta Association, he collaborates with other growers and is helping to organize Alberta's first-ever haskap field research with the University of Saskatchewan. The three-year Results Driven Agriculture Research backed project will test 20 producers to create baseline soil requirements.

Rosychuk loves sharing his knowledge and is excited about Alberta's growing horticulture opportunities.

"I'm glad that I'm in Sturgeon County because it is really supportive of new enterprises."