

Connecticut Weekly AGRICULTURAL REPORT

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Connecticut Department of Agriculture
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BERRY FARM EVOLVES, ADAPTS TO BETTER SERVE CUSTOMERS AND THEIR LAND

By Steve Jensen, Office of Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky

WATERTOWN - The steady flow of pick-your-own customers in the pristine-looking orchards at Evergreen Berry Farm on Tuesday likely had no idea of the complex and time-consuming work that the Alex family puts in to offer them the simple pleasure of picking berries.

Now in its 35th season, Cathee and Bob Alex along with daughter Caitlin and her husband Nick attribute their longevity to a commitment to evolving and adapting their farming practices, as well as their approach and offerings to their customers.

"We each bring something unique to the farm," said Caitlin, who with Cathee runs the business end of the operation, with Bob and Nick handling the farming. "It's been fun to do this as a family and to make it work."

Bob and Cathee started the farm in 1979 by clearing the field of stones and trees and planting 7,000 blueberry "whips" by hand that were ready for picking three years later. That first season, their small crop was picked out in four days.

Today, they offer picking of 8-1/2 acres of blueberries and two acres of raspberries and blackberries from July through September, drawing perhaps 15,000 customers per season. As Tuesday morning's rain cleared and was

replaced by a hot sun, customers were handed white plastic buckets or smaller pails worn around the neck and headed out to the fields.

Many of the customers were small family groups including children, reflecting a trend toward customers who visit for fun as much as fruit.

"It used to be that customers came to load up," with multiple pounds of berries, said Caitlin. "We still have those, but now it's more for the experience of picking. They'll pick a quart and enjoy their time here and leave."

That trend has prompted the family to try new offerings to broaden the appeal of the farm.

For the first time this season, customers can cool off after picking with a drink made exclusively from ingredients grown on the farm, including seltzer infused with blueberries, raspberries, or mint.

Ice cubes are made with pieces of fruit or rose petal or mint that emerge in the drink as the ice melts.

"It's hot when we're picking in July," Caitlin said.



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CONNECTICUT FARMERS' MARKET

Price per lb or as noted. Week of July 2-8, 2017.

BEANS, GREEN, PER QT	3.00	3.00
BLUEBERRIES, PER PT	4.00	4.00
BROCCOLI, PER LB	2.49	2.49
CABBAGE, PER LB	.99	.99
CARROTS, PER BUNCH	2.00	2.00
CUKES, /3	1.00	1.00
GREENS, /BUNCH	1.00	3.50
HERBS, /BUNCH	2.00	2.50
KHOLRABI, EACH	1.00	1.00
LETTUCE, EACH	1.00	3.00
PEAS, PER PT	3.00	3.00
PICKLING CUKES, QT	1.99	3.00
RADISHES, PER BUNCH	1.00	2.50
RASPBERRIES, PER PT	5.00	5.00
RHUBARB, PER BUNCH	5.00	5.00
SCALLIONS, /BUNCH	1.00	2.00
SPINACH, /BAG	3.00	3.00
SQUASH, PER LB	1.49	1.99
SQUASH, EACH	.50	1.00
TOMATOES, PER LB	3.49	3.99
TOMATOES, PER QT	4.00	4.00

NORTHEAST EGGS/USDA

Per doz. Grade A and Grade A white in cartons to retailers (volume buyers)

XTRA LARGE	.72	.87
LARGE	.66	.80
MEDIUM	.50	.63

NEW ENGLAND SHELL EGGS

Per doz. Grade A brown in carton delivered store door. (Range)

XTRA LARGE	1.21	1.31
LARGE	1.11	1.21
MEDIUM	.81	.91
SMALL	.54	.58

NEW HOLLAND, PA. HOG AUCTION

Avg dressing. Per cwt.

52-56	200-300 lbs	62.00	66.00
	300-350 lbs	59.00	62.00
48-52	200-300 lbs	57.00	61.50
	300-350 lbs	51.00	58.00
Sows, US 1-3	300-500 lbs	43.00	50.50
	500-800 lbs	43.00	46.50
Boars	300-400 lbs	21.00	32.00
	600-800 lbs	5.00	10.50

NEW HOLLAND, PA. FEEDER PIG

July 5, 2017

US 1-2			
30-40 LBS	120.00	180.00	
40-50 LBS	130.00	147.00	
50-60 LBS	110.00	140.00	
60-80 LBS	100.00	110.00	
US 2			
20-30 LBS	100.00	170.00	
30-40 LBS	120.00	160.00	
40-50 LBS	140.00	145.00	
50-60 LBS	140.00	140.00	
60-80 LBS	125.00	125.00	

WHOLESALE FRUITS & VEGETABLESBoston Terminal and Wholesale Grower Prices
NEW ENGLAND GROWN

	LOW	HIGH
ALFALFA SPROUTS, 5 LB CTN	14.00	14.00
ALFALFA SPROUTS, 12-4 OZ	16.00	16.50
BEAN SPROUTS, 12-12 OZ	12.00	15.00
BEAN SPROUTS, 10 LBS	6.00	7.00
BEANS, GREEN, FLAT, BU	45.00	45.00
BEANS, GRN, HNDPKD, BU	38.00	40.00
BEANS, WAX, BU	48.00	48.00
CABBAGE, GRN, 50 LB, 1-3/4BU	16.00	16.00
CAULIFLOWER, 9S JKTPK	20.00	20.00
CIDER, APPLE, 4-1 GALLON	21.00	22.00
CIDER, APPLE, 9-1/2 GALLON	22.50	25.00
CORN, 5 DOZ	18.00	18.00
KALE, LACINITO, 12 BN	15.00	15.00
LETTUCE, BOSTON, 24	15.00	15.00
RHUBARB, OPN FIELD, 20 LB	35.00	36.00
SQUASH, ZUCH, S, 1/2 BU	12.00	12.00
TOMS, GHS, CHRRY, 5 LBS	13.00	14.00
TOMS, GHS, CHRRY, 8-10 OZ	20.00	24.00
TOMS, GHS, 15 LB FLAT	17.00	18.00
TOMS, GHS, 11 LBS, ON VINE	11.00	12.00

SHIPPED IN

BLACKBRY, CA, 12- 6OZ	36.00	36.00
BLUEBERRY, NJ, LG, 12-1 PT	23.00	26.00
BOK CHOY, NJ, 2 BU	20.00	26.00
BOKCHOY, SHANGHAI, NJ, 10 LB	14.00	16.00
BROCCOLI, CA, 20 LBS LOOSE	18.00	22.00
BRSSLS SPROUTS, CA, 25 LB	46.00	50.00
CABBAGE, GRN, NJ, 50 LBS	12.00	14.00
CABBAGE, RED, NJ, 1-3/4 BU	19.00	21.00
CARROTS, BUNCHED, CA, 24	19.00	21.00
CHRRY, DKSWT, WA, 15LB, 10-1/2	45.00	45.00
CHIN. CABBAGE, NJ, 50 LB, 12	16.00	18.00
COLLARDS, NJ, 1-3/5 BU, 12	12.00	14.00
CUKES, NJ, 1-1/9	28.00	32.00
CUKE, PCKL, NJ, 1-1/9, 200-300	34.00	36.00
DANDELION GRNS, NJ, 12 BN	16.00	18.00
EGGPLANT, NJ, MED, 1-1/9	15.00	16.00
ESCAROLE, NJ, 1.3 BU, 24	15.00	18.00
KHOLRABI, NJ, 12 BN	18.00	20.00
LEEKs, NJ, 12	16.00	18.00
MESCLIN MIX, CA, 3 LBS	8.00	9.00
PARSLEY, CURLY, NJ, 60	22.00	24.00
PARSLEY, PLAIN, NJ, 60	24.00	25.00
PEACH, YL, NJ, USX1, 1/2BU, 2-1/4"	28.00	30.00
PEPPER, CUBANL, NJ, 1-1/9	21.00	22.00
RADISHES, NJ, 24 CT	14.00	16.00
PEPPER, LONGHOT, GA, 1-1/9	15.00	19.00
SPINACH, FLAT, NJ, 24 BN	22.00	24.00
SQUASH, YEL, NJ, LG, 1/2 BU	12.00	12.00
SQUASH, YEL, NJ, 1/2 BU	10.00	12.00
SWISSCHARD, NJ, RNBOW, 12CT	18.00	18.00
SWISS CHARD, RED, 12 CT	16.00	16.00
TOMS, CHERRIES, NJ, 12-1 PT	12.00	14.00
TOM, CHERRY, ORG, FL, 12-1PT	29.00	32.00
TOM, MATR GRNS, FL, 5X6, 25 LB	17.00	18.00
TURNIPS, PRPL TOP, NJ, 25LB	10.00	12.00
TURNIP TOP GREENS, GA, 12	14.00	16.00

MIDDLESEX LIVESTOCK AUCTION

Middlefield, CT - July 10, 2017

	LOW	HIGH
Bob Calves:		
45-60 lbs.	35.00	40.00
61-75 lbs.	98.00	107.50
76-90 lbs.	110.00	112.50
91-105 lbs.	115.00	118.50
106 lbs. & up	120.00	125.00
Farm Calves	127.50	130.00
Starter Calves	50.00	55.00
Veal Calves	70.00	160.00
Feeder Heifers	110.00	130.00
Beef Heifers	72.00	80.00
Feeder Steers	67.00	100.00
Beef Steers	80.00	119.00
Feeder Bulls	110.00	135.00
Beef Bulls	86.00	93.00
Replacement Cows	n/a	n/a
Replacement Heifers	n/a	n/a
Boars	n/a	n/a
Sows	n/a	n/a
Butcher Hogs	n/a	n/a
Feeder Pigs each	n/a	n/a
Sheep each	107.00	210.00
Lambs each	60.00	230.00
Goats each	60.00	370.00
Kid Goats each	32.50	140.00
Canners	up to	69.50
Cutters	70.00	73.00
Utility Grade Cows	74.00	77.50
Rabbits each	5.00	16.00
Chickens each	3.00	18.00
Ducks each	5.00	12.00

LANCASTER, PA., LIVESTOCK SUMMARY

Avg. Dressing. Per cwt. Unless noted.

	LOW	HIGH
SLAUGHTER COWS Avg. Dressing		
breakers 75-80% lean	74.00	79.00
boners 80-85% lean	74.00	79.00
lean 88-90% lean	66.00	72.00
SLAUGHTER STEERS		
Hi Ch/Prime 3-4	124.00	128.00
Choice 2-3	118.00	124.00
Select 1-2	112.00	118.00
SLAUGHTER HOLSTEINS		
Hi Choice/Prime 3-4	95.00	96.00
Choice 2-3	92.00	95.00
Sel 1-2	87.00	91.00
SLAUGHTER HEIFERS		
Hi Ch/Prime 2-3	120.00	124.00
Choice 2-3	113.00	119.00
CALVES - Graded bull		
No 1 90-130 lbs	130.00	136.00
SLAUGHTER LAMBS: Woolled & Shorn		
Markets: Choice and Prime 2-3		
90-110 lbs	180.00	212.00
110-130 lbs	180.00	197.00
SLAUGHTER EWES: Good 2-3		
120-160 lbs	80.00	100.00
160-200 lbs	80.00	90.00
200-300 lbs	87.00	90.00
SLAUGHTER KIDS: Sel 1		
20-40 lbs	115.00	140.00
40-60 lbs	150.00	175.00
60-80 lbs	160.00	195.00
80-100 lbs	190.00	205.00
SLAUGHTER NANNIES/DOES: Sel 1		
80-130 lbs	170.00	235.00
130-170 lbs	220.00	270.00
SLAUGHTER BUCKS/BILLIES: Sel 1		
100-150 lbs	235.00	280.00
150-250 lbs	300.00	345.00

(Continued from Page 1)

“Having an ice cold beverage that comes directly from the land we have is something pretty special. We want to create drinks that taste amazing but are also amazing for your health.”

Drinks are made in a commercial kitchen installed for this season in a small barn that serves as the farm’s checkout counter, where they also offer other farms’ products such as maple syrup and soap.

The kitchen, as well as a half-bathroom for employee use, were funded with the help of a state Dept. of Agriculture grant intended to help farms comply with new federal Food Safety Modernization Act rules.

Cathee said getting approvals to complete the renovation work was a long and tedious undertaking, but the project represents an important step toward the farm’s future.

“It was a two-year process for us starting with the well and the septic and all the carpentry that went on in there,” she said. “We went right down to the wire to get it done before picking started this year, but it gives us options and flexibility we didn’t have before.”

Plans for the loft area above the kitchen include the use of skylights as a “solar dehydrator” to dry berries or herbs for sale in the off-season months.

Another major evolution in the farm was made in 2012 when the family, spearheaded by Bob and Nick, decided to convert to entirely organic practices.

The change, prompted by a decline of new plant growth and yield in their orchards, has not always been easy. Instead of using fungicides to control diseases like phytophthora, a mold that thrives in moisture and can decimate plants, the farm has

improved drainage in the fields to minimize production of the mold. It also has started to rotate particularly struggling areas through cover crops, aiming to improve soil biodiversity and overall soil health.

This year’s wet spring and early summer made the mold a particular challenge.

“With this much rain we have soil that is almost constantly saturated,” said Nick, a Virginia Tech graduate with a background in crop and soil sciences.

Pest control is aided by the use of a falcon brought in for a couple of hours a day to chase away birds that, left unchecked, can wipe out a crop.

Birds are also deterred by a noise cannon, a loud-speaker broadcasting predatory bird calls, and a scare-crow.

“I try to approach everything from as many angles as I can,” said Nick.

The falcon, a Gyr Saker hybrid bred in captivity and named Zoe, swooped low over the fruit bushes and the heads of customers Tuesday as it circled the farm.

“Anything that has a wing we want out of there,” handler John White of Southbury said before calling the bird back to his protected forearm with a double-blast of a whistle and a lure of food.

Bob usually handles falcon duties, but is currently away on an extended hiking trip in Colorado.

Caitlin, who has a degree in biological sciences from UConn, said all the attention to detail at the farm is aimed at one goal – to enhance the microbial and nutrient balance of the soil in order to produce the healthiest product possible.

“There are not many places left like this where people can come out and connect directly with their food grown in healthy soils,” she said. “They’re essentially eating right from the bush, and that is so important for their health.”

FOR SALE

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WANTED

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MISCELLANEOUS

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Clockwise from top left: A patch of black raspberries ripens at Evergreen Berry Farm; Cathee Alex and daughter Caitlin ready picking buckets for customers; John White and falcon Zoe ready for a bird-control patrol of the farm.

Page 1 left: Cathee holding a handful of Blue Crop variety blueberries (L) and the smaller but hardier Northland. **Page 1 right:** A raspberry seltzer drink being offered by the farm for the first time this year.

FUNDING ELIMINATED FOR SENIOR FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM (SFMNP)

Due to the lack of a state budget being enacted by the General Assembly by July 1, funding for SFMNP has been effectively eliminated.

Farmers should immediately stop accepting SFMNP checks for produce and honey, because they cannot be compensated for the transaction at this time.

The affected SFMNP checks are "2 million series" numbered 2000001 through 2200000.

Farmers also may be presented with SFMNP "3 million series" checks numbered 3000001 through 3006000. Farmers receiving these checks can accept them in exchange for produce or honey.

This check series is covered under the federal SFMNP, which is fully funded by the USDA. They are the same color as the 2 million series checks.

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program checks can also be accepted. These checks are a pink color with a 1 million series check numbering.

If you have collected a 2 million series SFMNP check, please hold onto it and do not attempt to deposit it.

If the checks are able to be deposited in the future, or if any other changes arise, the Dept. of Agriculture will notify all involved parties immediately.

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