

COOP'S BLUEBERRIES

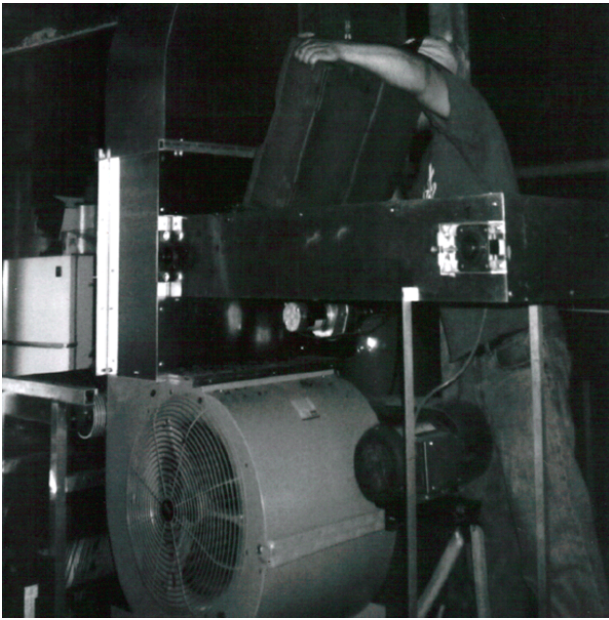
Want to buy a quart of fresh local blueberries ready for the pie? How about a four quart box of frozen berries to sprinkle on your cereal next winter? Gerald and Sharon Cooper are building a business based on buyers who enjoy eating blueberries, but don't want the job of picking on a hot August afternoon.

Readers will remember Corice Cooper's diary that we featured in issues 132 through 140. Corice and Sam harvested blueberries as documented in the diary and by the picture on page 1. Their son Carleton and wife Lida lived in the same home also grew blueberries. Their son Gerald and his wife Sharon Cooper are the third generation to harvest the tasty blue fruit. And now their son CJ and his partner Crystal are part of the operation.



Gerald Cooper on his ride-on raking machine; a full 8-bushel tote of berries ready for DEBBCO

Today Gerald's harvesting operation depends on two machines; one is a walk behind harvester like the one pictured on page 5. The other is a ride-on harvester pictured here. Most of the berries harvested are loaded into eight-bushel totes that hold about 400 pounds of berries. That compares with the traditional ½ bushel box that holds about 24 pounds of berries. The totes require a tractor with forks to move them from the field to the truck or trailer used to haul the berries to the receiving station. Gerald uses a trailer to haul the totes to DEBBCO (Down East BlueBerry Coop) in East Machias.



Aaron dumps a box on berries into the fresh pack processing machine; Crystal and Sharon pick over the final product, blueberries ready for a pie!

What happens to the rest of the berries? They are brought to a garage in half-bushel boxes and introduced to the fresh pack processing machine, a truly wonderful thing. In one end CJ or Aaron pours in a box of berries. Wind, gravity and moving belts clean the berries. They fall onto a picking-over table belt where human eyes spot and human hands remove anything that was missed by the machine. The berries leave the belt as clean as hand picked berries. In 2010 the Coopers are charging \$3.75 a quart. The frozen berries are blasted on trays in a Turbo Air Freezer and sell for \$15.00 a five-pound box. Call (207) 454-7811 to order the frozen berries.