

Woman of earth and passion: An encounter with a Quebec wild blueberry grower

Asked what prompted Marie Bélanger to choose wild blueberry production as a profession in the village of Albanel in Lac-Saint-Jean, her answer is not what you might expect: “A love of animals,” she says.

“I was a nurse, and I dreamed of getting closer to the land and to nature. When I first met Jonathan, who soon would become my life partner, he told me about his desire to work with cows. This resonated deeply with me, as I’ve always been an animal lover. But when we realized the costs associated with dairy farming, we took a step back.”

That’s when a different opportunity came along: a wild blueberry field went up for sale. Drawing on their family’s experience in blueberry production, they decided to take the plunge.

“I had heard that managing a wild blueberry field was a piece of cake. But as I learned more about the requirements, like equipment, financing, management and accounting tools, not to mention basic horticultural challenges, I quickly realized that it was more complex than anticipated. But nothing I couldn’t take on!”

Today, their routine working three parcels of land totalling 120 acres is well established. And, they don’t hesitate to



Marie Bélanger and her 2 boys

involve their two children in some tasks.

“Since we are 80% organic in terms of what we produce, there is a lot of weed pulling that has to be done by hand. The children are glad to do their part. The youngest, who is only 8, even helps with harvesting in his own way. That happens late in the evening or at night. We set up a little place in the tractor where he can sleep since he will sometimes refuse to stay in bed during harvesting! Is succession ensured?”

As a proud wild blueberry producer, Marie approaches her leadership role with inspiration and generosity, all while working to keep family united through the daily grind.

“Jonathan and I keep part-time jobs on top of growing wild blueberries. With all our other commitments as a family – kids and school – it would be easy to lose track. I keep everything planned and organized. When it’s time to talk business, I remind Jonathan of the need for what I

affectionately like to call a ‘shareholders’ meeting’. Plus, I insist that we go to a few comedy shows in town every year, because it’s essential to unplug and find time to laugh.”

Marie insists that, today, she is for want of nothing. As proof she points to the farm – which includes a few animals, naturally!

This grower profile is brought to you by the Wild Blueberry Association of North America (WBANA), March 2025.