

CELEBRATE KINGS: *Pride in our people, places & products*

From roots to berries - leading the field in strawberry plant production

From the road, the sprawling farm set back in the field appears quiet and unassuming. But near the end of the lane, a different and very busy picture emerges involving research, plant production, and direct marketing!

On North Bishop Road in Lakeville, Kings County, is the farm of Charles and Doris Keddy and the home of their two businesses - Charles Keddy Farms Ltd. and C.O. Keddy Incorporated. The first company involves all the land, machinery and crop growing, and the second deals with marketing the nursery crops.

First generation farmers, Charles and

Doris have been farming together for 29 years. As a family business, their son, two daughters, and a son-in-law all play a part. Strawberry plants make up their major crop, and the Keddys are dedicated to researching ways of improving their product.

"We work with plant breeders to help develop new strawberry varieties," says Charles. "We have a small micro-propagation lab for multiplication of stock in test tubes and jars." One plant can be multiplied many times with each new plant being exactly like the original, and it can be done during the winter's off-season.

The farm's nursery is the head licensee for several new varieties of strawberry plants developed at the research center in Kentville. "We always have a research project going," says Doris. "We're working on the leading edge."

Strawberry plants are dug and shipped in both fall and spring. During the peak harvest season, the farm employs over 60 people.

"From September 20 to October 20, we shipped seven to eight million plants, mainly to Florida - and they're all hand counted," says Charles. "We take them from the ground here and within the week they could be in the ground there."

In the spring season, the market for strawberry plants is across Canada and the northern United States. "We can be harvesting strawberry plants in one field for our northern market and, at the same time, be planting a whole new crop in another field," says Doris. The Keddys also grow raspberry cane, blackberry, and high bush blueberry plants. Everything is sold through direct marketing.

"We're unique in the fact we market our own product and do so all across North America," says Doris. With this year's combined spring and fall plant harvest, the farm will have sold over 12 million

strawberry plants, mainly through word-of-mouth.

Even with the many hours it takes to operate the farm business, the Keddys believe it is important to have a voice in their industry. Charles has been president of several farming organizations including the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture and the North American Strawberry Growers Association. He is currently co-chair of the AgraPoint Board of Directors. To Charles and Doris, their crowning moment of recognition came in 1992, when they were selected "Outstanding Young Farmers of Canada".

The 500-acre farm and its nursery are always open to visitors. So when driving down North Bishop Road, take a few minutes to check out the farm down the long lane, and discover farming on the "leading edge"!

Story and photo by Marlene Huntley



Charles and Doris show some strawberry plants ready for shipping.



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