



The British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association

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2013 TREE FRUIT INDUSTRY AWARDS

Kelowna, BC - The BC Fruit Growers' Association (BCFGA) is pleased to announce the recipients of the annual Tree Fruit Industry Awards. The awards were presented during the 3rd Annual BC Tree Fruit Horticultural Symposium, jointly organized by the BCFGa and the Okanagan Packinghouse Fieldmen's Group, held in Kelowna, BC on March 6-7, 2013.

2013 recipients include:

Golden Apple Award

(Sponsored by Chemtura AgroSolutions)

Michel Labelle Farms, Penticton

Compact Orchard Award

(Sponsored by Dow AgroSciences)

Mike and Priscilla Melnichuk, Kelowna

Soft Fruit Award

(Sponsored by Arysta LifeSciences)

Beulah Orchards, Summerland

The BC Fruit Growers' Association represents the 550 commercial orchards in BC, with a mandate "to foster a healthy food system for the long-term prosperity of BC tree fruit growers".

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For further information:

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BACKGROUNDER 2012 TREE FRUIT INDUSTRY AWARDS

Golden Apple Trophy (Sponsor Chemtura AgroSolutions)

Michel Labelle Farms, Penticton

Michel Labelle was born and raised in the apple region of Mont-St. Gregoire, Quebec. He moved to BC and in 1982, he commenced leasing 3 small orchards. He is enjoying a lifelong interest in farming.

Michel Labelle met his wife Hilma in Penticton and married in England in 1981. Michel has 2 grown children living in Victoria BC, Saphire (B.Sc Nursing program) and Myke (BC Ministry of Justice).

Michel has kept his farming philosophy very simple: keep orchards super clean, work as a team, hire the best people and nurture those relationships. Michel is a big believer in summer pruning, implements a strong nutrient program and monitors for a pest free environment under the watchful eyes of senior team member Laurie Navrot.

Michel currently manages 20 acres; this includes 11 acres of apples (super spindle/slender spindle), 3 acres of soft fruit and 3 acres of cherries.

Michel has 5 retired orchardists on his team. He advocates surrounding yourself with knowledge, passing down information from generation to generation and engaging with people with specialized expertise, such as horticulturist Nicole Verpaelst who gave her time and interest beyond expectations.

Compact Orchard Award (sponsor Dow AgroSciences)

Mike and Priscilla Melnichuk, Kelowna, BC

Mike Melnichuk was born in Kelowna the year of 1944. When Mike was two years old his parents purchased an apple orchard in the Ellison district, that's a future orchardist was born. While attending high school in 1962, Mike and his father purchased another orchard and operated the farm together for 6 years. In 1968 Mike and Priscilla met and married. Priscilla dedicated herself to the orchard partnership and is a key part of the operation. The orchard became the Melnichuk's home place where they raised three children, Janice, Kathy, and Norman – with everyone helping in the farm chores.

In 1974 Priscilla and Mike purchased one 10 acre lot from Mike's parents home place, and later purchased the remaining portion of the original home place. In 1979 the couple purchased a 25 acre hay farm in Ellison, of which 20 acres was planted to apple orchard.

In the early 90's major and exciting changes in how orchards were being planted and managed were evolving from Europe, focusing on early production of high quality fruit. This new style of orchard was called Super Spindle. In 1992 10 industry people, including 7 apple growers (Mike included) traveled to Europe to see these Super Spindle orchards, and learn more about them.

The Melnichuk's re-planted some of older plantings to Super Spindle with new varieties - mainly Gala, which worked out very well for the operation. In 1993 Mike and Priscilla decided to plant one acre of Honeycrisp. Mike was convinced that this variety would win the people's choice award, and it has become a favorite. The Melnichuk's have continued to plant the Honeycrisp cultivar even though "growing this variety can be very frustrating to say the least", in Mike's words

At present Melnichuk's have approx 40 acres of producing orchard, in the varieties are Honeycrisp, Gala, Granny Smith, Spartan, and McIntosh.

Soft Fruit Award (sponsor Arysta LifeSciences)

Beulah Orchards, Summerland

Michael Beulah and Pat Beulah

Michael Beulah grew up on his grandfathers orchard in Summerland. Michael Obtained a BSc in Agriculture in crop protection. In 1982 Michael began his own farming career by purchasing 10 acres in Summerland.

Michael and Pat have 2 grown daughters who are getting involved with the family operation. The Beulah's leased another 10 acres all in cherries by 1994. The total operation is 20 acres in orchard with an additional 5 acres to be developed (unplanted in 2012).

Cherry varieties grown on the farm include: Lapins (10 acres), Sweethearts (2 acres), Staccato (3 acres), Kootenay Special (3 acres) and Skeena and Sentennial (1 acre each).

Beulah's operate a small packing line on the orchard property, and most of the cherry production is destined for export markets. The cherries grown by Beulah's are large sized with high quality, and yields are excellent.