



## MEDIA RELEASE



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Keeping Birds at Bay from B.C. Blueberry Harvest**

**July 25, 2006 – Abbotsford, B.C.** Blueberries are delicious and not just to us. Birds love them! Every year thousands upon thousands of starlings, crows and song birds descend on blueberry fields all over British Columbia's Fraser Valley – where more than 95% of Canada's highbush blueberries are grown – to feast on the fruits of farmers' labours. This invasion adds up to significant losses to farmers and not just from consumed berries, but also to fruit that is downgraded due to damage by these winged predators.

Protecting this high-value crop from bird predation has been a huge challenge for blueberry farmers. There are many devices available to deter birds from entering fields. Unfortunately not all are effective or affordable. Many farmers employ noise devices to discourage birds and mitigate damage, but the same noise that frightens the birds can also cause disruption to neighbours.

Recognizing the impact that the use of noise devices can have on its neighbours, the blueberry industry devised a program to work with individual farmers to develop an integrated approach to crop protection. By using a variety of scare techniques to deter birds from blueberry fields – such as audible devices and visual techniques (hawk kites, reflective streamers, etc) – this integrated approach would improve relations with neighbours and hopefully decrease losses more than the use of a single approach. In light of the significant efforts the blueberry industry is willing to take to improve relationships in the communities in which they farm, the Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative agreed to provide \$30,000 funding support for this \$75,000 stewardship project running from 2003 to August 31, 2007.

One component of this project was the development of a GIS database that includes complaints by region, location of farms and neighbours. The information was then used to conduct an awareness and education program focusing on growers' responsibilities to reduce the impact of their farming practices on neighbours. An advisor was also hired to visit farms, discuss the impacts of noise on others in the community and help farmers implement an integrated approach to bird management. In addition to working with farmers, the advisor plays a role in mitigating issues that arise around the use of noise scare devices by helping neighbours and farmers better understand each other's concerns.

Is this strategy working? It seems to be.

“Since this program has started, we have seen growers and neighbours understand each other better,” said Nazam Dulat, advisor for the B.C. Blueberry Council integrated bird management project. “And we have seen a reduction in complaints about bird scare devices.”

“Without the B.C. Blueberry Council’s involvement, I think we would still be struggling with enforcement versus proactive compliance efforts and cooperation,” added the City of Surrey’s senior bylaw officer, John Hofmann.

Neighbours are in agreement with the success of this program too. Each season the B.C. Blueberry Council receives many letters of commendation for this program and encouragement to continue. Although there is still work to be done, the efforts made and the successes gained so far are undeniable.

This project – a joint undertaking of the B.C. Blueberry Council and the Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative (AEPI) – is an example of how working together can bring awareness and understanding of the issues to both farmers and their communities.

The AEPI provides funding assistance for farmers in B.C. to address environmental issues, enhance environmental sustainability and reduce the impacts of wildlife on agriculture. Funding for the AEPI is provided through the Agri-Food Futures Fund, a joint program of the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. AEPI funds are held in trust with the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C. The B.C. Agriculture Council manages the program.

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