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New Markets Emerging for BC Raspberries

January 10, 2011 Abbotsford, B.C.

There are exciting new markets for BC aseptic processed raspberry products as concentrated purees for the growing fruit smoothie and energy bar market in Canada. That is according to a market opportunity development assessment recently completed by Abbotsford Growers Co-operative Union.

B.C. is by far the largest producer of raspberries in Canada, growing over 26.5 million pounds on 4,200 acres. Fruit processors like Abbotsford Growers Co-op are essential to maintaining a raspberry sector in this province because, with a harvest period of 4-6 weeks, only 3% of the berries make it to the fresh market. Owned by 120 member growers, Abbotsford Growers has the only aseptic fruit processing facility in western Canada, an investment that it believes will better enable BC raspberries to compete with increased competition from lower cost producers in Eastern Europe and South America.

Aseptic processing is a high temperature sterile process similar to that used to package wine into 'bags in a box' and milk into Ultra High Temperature packages. The main benefit of aseptic processed berries is that they do not require refrigeration, decreasing energy costs and freeing up scarce cold storage space. Additionally, because the packaging material is sterile before processing, thermal stress on the product is minimized, resulting in a fresh taste. Aseptic processing creates a preservative-free product, which will also appeal to consumers. A recent on-line article in Canadian publication Chatelaine identified raspberries as a #1 'superfood', containing significant fibre and vitamin C while being one of the best sources of ellagic acid, an antioxidant that is believed to have powerful cancer fighting properties.

One of the surprise findings of the market assessment is that raspberries are being substituted with cheaper products like sugar beets in ice cream and yogurt. "Food processors do not like to admit it, but some of them do not use raspberries, even for products like 'raspberry' yogurt," declares Cheryl Davie, the lead consultant on this project.

But there are some interesting opportunities emerging for aseptic processed concentrated raspberry purees for fruit smoothies and energy bars. "We contacted a large processor of energy bars using fruit purees just as they working on a project examining how they can source more Canadian products. They were very interested in using BC aseptic processed raspberries." declares Cheryl Davie, the lead consultant on this project.

Stephen Evans, General Manager at Abbotsford Growers concludes, “We are enthusiastic about some of the new opportunities identified in Canada that could grow in the long run, but the study also found that export opportunities will be very important for future growth, so we will be pursuing this as well.”

Funding for this project was provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP). In British Columbia, this program is delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C.