

The employment scene on PEI
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Bio-refinery to be constructed in Kensington

by Patricia Roy

Bioscience / Agriculture

Steve Howatt, General Manager for **Nature's Crops International**, says plans for constructing an oil extraction facility are coming together at the Terra Nova building in Kensington. "We moved in before Christmas and further construction is planned for the first half of 2010. Everything should be completed by September."

Nature's Crops International was established on PEI last spring. The parent company, **Technology Crops International**, supplies specialty oils for food manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and industrial uses. The company is based in North Carolina and has contracted growers to produce crops in the US, UK, and New Zealand. PEI was chosen for their first expansion into Canada. "We are working with farmers on PEI to help them grow new crops and generate new sources of revenue," Steve says.



Steve Howatt is General Manager for Nature's Crops International. The company is in the process of expanding into a 20,000 square-foot facility which will house an administration office, research lab, bulk grain receiving and crop oil refinery unit.

Crops grown in 2009

Over the summer of 2009, about 25 farmers grew over 1,100 acres of conventionally grown crambe, organic crambe and oil-seed hemp. Steve says there is a fairly large demand for organically produced crops.

"The past year was a challenging one for many crops, but crambe performed quite well over all," he says. "Generally speaking, we learned a few things that we can do better in the future. The crops are now in storage at local farms until the bio-refinery begins operations. We are pretty optimistic for the 2010 growing season."

Uses for refined oils from specialty crops

The refined oils from these crops are used in the production of industrial lubricants, plastics, food additives, and cosmetics. "The big market for us right now comes from one of our customers who uses crambe oil as an ingredient in manufacturing cosmetics such as creams and hair care products," he says.

Plans for future growing seasons

In order to increase awareness of the bio-refinery and to help farmers understand how to grow these new crops, Nature's Crops International will be holding information meetings across the province over the winter months.

"We will be looking for more growers and we hope to have several thousand acres in production next summer. There are also plans to produce specialty sunflowers, oil-seed hemp, borage, and calendula."

The company's long-term goal is to produce 20,000 to 30,000 acres of new crop alternatives and to generate premium prices for PEI growers.

Employment opportunities

"We have a lot on the go with only three people on staff right now; myself as **General Manager**, **Darcy MacDonald** as **Processing Manager**, and **Reuel Wood** as **Agronomist**. After January, we hope to have six or seven people on staff, which is still very small considering the volume of work ahead of us.

"We are currently in the process of hiring another **Crop Agronomist**, a **Process Development Technician**, and an **Administrative Assistant**. We will be conducting interviews early in the New Year and hope to fill these positions as soon as possible."

Once the refinery begins operating in fall 2010, additional employees will be needed to work in the plant. "We will need people with experience in handling grains or who have worked in food processing facilities. We will train on-site for some of the positions. I expect to be doing some of the hiring for those positions during the summer. We will likely have about 20 people working here by this time next year."

For more information, contact **Steve Howatt** at 836-3332.
 E-mail admin@naturescrops.com or visit www.naturescrops.com

