

The Employment Journey

PEI's Top Source for Career Planning and Job Seeking

From soil to oil Company offers farmers new crop options and will build a biorefinery on PEI

by Heidi Riley

Nature's Crops International is a new company on PEI, and **Steve Howatt** is the new General Manager. Steve is working to interest Island farmers in producing crops that have not been grown commercially on PEI before. The company plans to build a biorefinery on PEI that will extract and refine oils from the seeds that are grown.

The parent company, **Technology Crops International**, supplies specialty oils for pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and industrial uses. The company is based in the US, and has growers contracted to produce crops in the US, the UK, and New Zealand. PEI was chosen for their first expansion into Canada.

"PEI has a good reputation for innovation and value-added products," says Steve. "Farmers here are interested in supplementing their potato rotations with high-value crops. These crops grow well in the climate of eastern Canada. We have sufficient moisture, we're not prone to droughts, and temperatures are cool. These conditions produce good quality oils."

Initially, the focus will be on growing crambe and producing oil from the seeds. This crop is grown and harvested much like canola, which farmers are already familiar with. There are also plans to work with specialty sunflowers, oil-seed hemp, borage, and calendula.

"This is a cross-over between agriculture and bioscience," says Steve. "Nature's Crops International will support farmers as they grow these specialty crops. We will conduct research for new uses for the oils. And we will optimize the value of the crop by doing the processing here on PEI."

"For this plan to grow and succeed, everyone has to win," says Steve. "Unless this is a good business venture for growers, there will be no long-term stability. We intend to sell a high-value product to our customers and pass on that increased value to our growing partners."

Plans for the present and future

"Our goal is to expose as many farmers as we can to the new crops. This year, we hope to grow 1,000 acres, with the majority planted with crambe. We hope to spread the knowledge so that more growers will be encouraged to grow these crops next year. Our ultimate goal is to have a large-scale biorefinery ready for the 2010 crop."

"An expansion to new crops will create economic spin-offs that will benefit many parts of the agriculture community on PEI," says Steve.



Steve Howatt holds the seeds that he hopes will create new opportunities for Island farmers. Steve is the general manager for Nature's Crops International, an agricultural company new to PEI.

Steve is an Agronomist, an expert in crop production. As a student, Steve left the Island to earn a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture at the Nova Scotia Agriculture College, and went on to a Masters of Agriculture at MacDonal College at McGill University in Montreal.

After completing his studies, he returned to PEI and has been involved with agriculture here for many years.

"There are so many careers available in agriculture," says Steve. "For example, you can earn a degree in agricultural engineering or agi-business, or take a two or three-year diploma program to become an agriculture technician or technologist."

"Growers should be confident that they will receive a reasonable profit margin for these specialty crops, and the contracted price will add stability to their incomes. Our company's success will be measured by the success of our growers."

Hiring plans

In the future, as the company grows, the company will hire an additional **Agronomist** to support growers as they become familiar with these new crops. By the end of 2009, as the biorefinery is ready for production, they will need a **Plant Manager**. The manager will need a processing or manufacturing background. In time, they will also need **support staff** to help run the plant.

For more information about Nature's Crops International, contact Steve Howatt at 628-5096 or visit www.naturescrops.com

For more information about agriculture training, visit www.nsac.ca or www.mcgill.ca/macdonald

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