

# MONEY DOES GROW ON TREES

*By Ken Taylor*

**Canadian farmers should be ashamed of themselves...at least I am ashamed! I was born and raised on our family farm and will probably die on my own family farm (I've been here thirty years already). This should qualify me as one talking from experience rather than those all too familiar voices that "circle talk" (recycle others' recycled info).**

**M**y first 16 years of family farm experience was invaluable in that it showed me how to run a *non-profitable* operation. My father had to work full time off the farm to make ends meet so I was given lots of hands-on responsibilities...like milking the cows, working with horses, slaughtering pigs, making hay, planting potatoes and pruning the orchard.

Why I am ashamed of myself? Since leaving my parents farm, it has taken me another thirty years to figure out how to farm and show a profit. I am ashamed that while I was learning to farm profitably, our Canadian food supply disappeared and we now must import the majority of our food to survive.

I am ashamed that we farmers are now being targeted as "destroyers of the planet" (first pesticide pollution and now greenhouse gases), and I always thought we were the caretakers of the land. I am ashamed to admit that most of my fellow farmers have sold out to the establishment called agribusiness. Sadly, these once proud and independent entrepreneurs have succumbed to a system of controlled "food

cartels" (quotas, tariffs, fines) and "welfare farming" with its yearly bail-outs or never-ending subsidies, none of which has much future. Even organic farming is a tough business these days but the time has

never been better to start new farming ventures. Farm land is "dirt cheap" and our farm product (local food) is gaining lots of public support.

I could mention all the farm ventures that have not been successful for me but my self-esteem is already badly shaken. After thirty years of costly mistakes (academia calls that research and development), I have now discovered that money really does grow on trees.

Now be careful, money does grow on trees but only a few special trees can predictably turn a profit every year! I credit my business-savvy son, Steve, with selecting the ones with most potential for making money. He showed this old prophet how to make a profit. For example, he showed me how our 3000-tree apple orchard could be turned into a profitable business by simply changing from apples to apple pears (also called Asian pears).



*Taylor apple pear (Asian pear)*



## Asian pears

I described how easy it is to grow this remarkable fruit in an earlier article (*TCOG* Spring 2009). Steve has analyzed the marketability of this product and has proven that it is a winner. The “money” that grows on 3000 of these special pear trees would be \$300,000 per year at today’s market value (fresh wholesale). Grow them organically and retail them off-season (they store for six months or more), and you will see their market value escalate. All of the apple pears on the commercial market are now imported; there will be Canadian demand for these for many years to come.

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**There is a lot of money to be made in the table grape market.**

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## Seedless grapes

Straight from the farm fields in faraway countries, we Canadians gobble up more seedless grapes than any other import (much more than bananas).

When we tested the Thompson seedless grape and red Flame seed-

less (the bulk of the imported grapes), we found the vines were killed every time. With the help of a friend (a scientist much smarter than me), we have tested hundreds of grape varieties and now have sweet and delicious seedless table grapes producing in our open fields (see “Grape varieties” on page 38). We are beginning to realize just how profitable table grapes are, particularly when compared to wine grapes and most other farm crops. There is no commercial production of seedless table grapes in Canada; the market is wide open for new entrepreneurs. With already proven annual sales of \$400-million and estimates of \$15,000/acre returns, there is a lot of money to be made in the table grape market.

**“By helping land owners establish sustainable and profitable farms we can have a positive impact on the environment, as well as the health of Canadians.”**

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**“Canada imports almost all of its fruit; retailers and wholesalers pay a fair price for that fruit. Much of the fruit imported can be grown here in Canada. Farmers and land owners need to know that they now have something viable to do with their land.”**

**—Ken Taylor & Steve Leroux**

## Nut trees

We have been testing all of the nut varieties for about 25 years.

**Walnuts:** Black, Carpathian, Heartnut, Butternut and Buartnut. By far the best are the Heartnut; we have selected for large size, easy cracking and hardness to  $-35^{\circ}\text{C}$ . I think the Heartnut represents the most significant tree that anyone can plant to save the planet from climate change problems. The nuts can be a substitute for meat/milk protein and the plant sequesters both carbon and nitrogen. I recommend starting with seedling trees to test in cold areas—they have vigorous initial growth, however for business potential, grafted trees are necessary for quicker returns on nut crop.

**Hazelnuts:** Great tall shrub for shelterbelts, windbreaks or just good dependable nut production with no work. We now have large hazelnuts on very hardy plants created by crossing wild Canadian hazels with larger European commercial filberts. These have great commercial potential as well.

**Chestnuts:** We have 25-year-old chestnut trees producing well. They love sandy acid soils. We have been crossing the Native American chestnut with the Chinese chestnut genus to increase disease resistance.

**Hickory and pecans:** I love the sweet nutty taste of these and we have very hardy selections of both. Compared to the native hickories, our plants have larger nuts and better taste. Our northern pecans are smaller than southern ones but taste better.

## Nut trees

For decades, I have been searching for ways to produce more profitable protein. It would take a book to outline the frustrations I have experienced in trying to produce conventional protein, namely meat, eggs, milk and beans. After years of changing directions, I finally discovered that protein grows much easier on a tree than anywhere else. We now have hundreds of these “meat trees” all over our farm (see photo of nut meat in shell). Our special nut-meat protein is delicious, healthy and stores forever.

Let's look at the profit potential for nut trees. Our trees produce huge crops (with no help from us) and the nut meats sell out quickly. We see the present market value of \$20,000–30,000 per acre becoming more and more profitable, particularly when so little investment is needed to bring this type of protein to the marketplace. This is certainly very different from most other meat or protein products sold today.



*Northbrite pear*

## Pears

Sometimes the road to making money is watching the small details and not really changing the direction. For example, I love properly ripened Bartlett pears; their sweet, aromatic, buttery flesh drives my sensations wild. At one point I had at least fifty dif-

## Grape varieties

We have been testing about a hundred varieties of grapes for over ten years. We compare hardiness, disease and pest resistance, bunch and grape size, earliness, Brix (dissolved solids) and acidity of juice, flesh texture and processing quality (for cooking or drying). We focus on seeded and seedless table grapes, and tried a few dual-purpose wine grapes.

The best rated seedless grapes have been:

- Earliblue – very early (ready to eat two months before Concord), very sweet, and our best seedless blue grape. Stores in fridge for many months.
- Redliance – very vigorous, very hardy, sweet muscat-flavoured flesh. Grapes are large red and reliable in production. This is my favourite.
- Polar Green – very sweet, yellow/green grape with juicy flesh that is much tastier than Thompson (the commercial seedless green grape).
- Magenta – grapes are small to medium in size with a dark red/purple magenta colour—very sweet, very hardy, and they “pop” or burst in your mouth.
- Pink Pearl – kids love these because the grapes are small (like pearls) but very sweet (we have had Brix readings of 25 on this one, which is very high for a northern grape).

At our farm, none of the above have been sprayed with fungicide (organic or otherwise) and all have survived –35°C winters without protection.

—Ken Taylor





*Black raspberries*

ferent varieties of Bartlett-type European pears while I was searching for one that could survive our worst winters and our disease-riddled summers. However, none of the varieties made it, but success did come by chance.

I used Bartlett pear seeds to grow small seedling trees on which I would graft commercial varieties. When the grafted commercial varieties died after a few years, some of the seedling trees were left to grow on their own. Two of these seedling trees matured and gave delicious pears. One we call BeauBart, as it looks like a large beautiful Bartlett, and the second is Northbrite. Northbrite, with its firm sweet flesh and shiny red skin, has much more profit potential than any of the original Bartlett-type pears I grafted.

### **Black raspberries**

We also grow all kinds of berries successfully, but marketing the fragile fruit is prone to losses, thereby cutting profit margins. After twenty years of changing varieties, we found our ideal berry. Easy to grow and handle, the

black-coloured raspberry has great profit potential.

We have about ten varieties of black raspberries. All are very good but our favourite is Earliblack. It is early, prolific, sweet and stores well.

Our customers love the fruit but, for some reason, we never see black raspberries in the commercial markets. It is a great fruit and

the lack of competition can only mean profit down the road.

In conclusion, should you be interested in further details of our farming ventures outlined above, contact our “profit man” Steve at [www.greenbarnnursery.ca](http://www.greenbarnnursery.ca)

*Ken Taylor was born in Danville, Quebec, and worked the family farm until a scholarship “coerced” him off the farm and culminated with a doctorate degree in biochemistry. His passion for farming returned 35 years ago with the purchase of seventy acres of vacant land on Ile Perrot, an island just 30 minutes from Montreal, where winter temperatures dip to -40 degrees.*

*Steve Leroux is a lifelong entrepreneur and direct sales specialist. After twenty years away from the family business, Steve returned to Windmill Point Farm in 2007. He chose to stay and start The Green Barn Nursery with his wife Robyn and stepfather Ken Taylor.*

