

# Agriculture harvest program

A huge success and plans to expand

by Gloria Welton

This fall, the **Harvest & Prosper** pilot program provided farmers and agriculture companies with some much-needed staff. The project provided participants with temporary jobs, and some workers gained full-time year-round work.

“This project could lead to people being hired for long-term jobs with good wages and benefits,” says **Laurie Loane** of the PEI Agriculture Sector Council.

“Also, the experience of working during harvest time sparked such an interest that more than 10 participants signed up for the **Farm Technician Apprenticeship** program, which starts in January 2018.

“One of the biggest challenges in the agriculture industry is labour shortages, especially during harvest time,” says Laurie. “People who work in the industry struggle with transportation and child care because of the long hours and rural work locations.”

The Harvest & Prosper program addressed some of the human resource issues in agriculture. The program gave newcomers, social assistance recipients, and clients on disability support an opportunity to be exposed to this line of work. Coaches and mentors helped participants overcome barriers to employment.

The following farmers and companies in the industry hired staff through the program: **MacKenzie Produce, Cavendish Farms Pooles Corner, Canadian Nectar Products, Lorne Valley Ranch, Smith Farms Ltd. and Atlantic Beef Products.**

Laurie says after the word got out about this pilot, more farmers wanted to get involved. “We are working with the other interested farmers to continue this collaboration for the 2018 harvest.”



From left: Greg MacKenzie, Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Alan McIsaac, Tanya MacKenzie, Family and Human Services Minister Tina Mundy, Workforce and Advanced Learning Minister Sonny Gallant, and Laurie Loane with the PEI Agriculture Sector Council. Submitted Photo

“Harvest & Prosper participants gained skills through working in the agriculture sector, and this transferable knowledge helps them transition into sustainable employment,” says Workforce and Advanced Learning Minister **Sonny Gallant**. “The program gave farmers and workers a chance to grow together.”

“The Adventure Group and the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada were also part of this project,” says Laurie. “They helped the workers prepare for the jobs and have a successful experience.”

“We hope this program will help those interested in working in agriculture to gain full-time, year-round or seasonal jobs.”

“We also encourage them to access other types of funding to continue their education in this field or connect to other types of jobs that will lead to full-time work in agriculture.”

“If someone is ready to get back into the workforce, we want to provide support to help remove barriers such as lack of transportation, child care, or even proper footwear,” says Family and Human Services Minister **Tina Mundy**. “I am very pleased that social assistance and disability support clients participating in this program were able to earn up to \$3,000 without affecting their social assistance benefits.”

“There are great jobs available in farming, with the sector employing over 3,800 people in peak periods,” says Agriculture and Fisheries Minister **Alan McIsaac**.

For more information, call PEI Agriculture Sector Council at 902-892-1091. Visit [www.peiagisc.ca](http://www.peiagisc.ca)



Harvest and Prosper is supported by the provincial government departments of Workforce and Advanced Learning, Family and Human Services, and Agriculture and Fisheries. They are partnering with the Agriculture Sector Council, the Adventure Group and the PEI Association for Newcomers. Provincial investments are supported by the Canada-PEI Labour Market Agreements.

## PEI Aquaculture

Growing an income

by Ruby Arsenault

According to the PEI Shellfish Association website, the number of oyster fishers and the numbers of pounds landed have steadily increased. In 1970, there were about 100 active fishers. By 2012, about 800 active fishers landed about 7,000,000 pounds of oysters.

**Kenneth Arsenault** is an oyster grower and harvester, and is the new President of the PEI Shellfish Association.

Kenneth has been employed in various industries. He worked on the construction of the Confederation Bridge, operated equipment in the Alberta oil patch, and worked as both a technician and foreman on many wind turbine farms across Canada.

Finally came the day when Kenneth was able to invest in an industry that would eventually provide him income on PEI and allow him to be closer to his family. His previous experience harvesting oysters gave Kenneth a strong background in the industry, and he decided to grow his own. His leases sit in waters along the town of Cascumpec off Gordon's Wharf.

Kenneth has been involved in the industry for 20 years. “You need a great deal of patience and the ability to work long days, which includes strenuous labour,” says Kenneth. “Growing a mature oyster takes up to three years. But it is all worth it once you get established.”

Oyster farmers lease areas of local rivers from the federal government. In the spring and summer months, work consists of collecting the oyster larvae, separating the seedlings, grading the oysters, and cleaning and flipping the cages, which are heavy and sometimes covered in green leafy seaweed.

“When they begin to grow, I divide them and place so many in each oyster cage. The cages float in the water and the oysters continue to grow.”

In the fall, harvest begins. Each oyster is sold individually, and is priced according to size, ranging from 35 cents to 55 cents each. Kenneth sells his oysters to various processors. “Once you are into the industry a few years, you can begin to support yourself.”

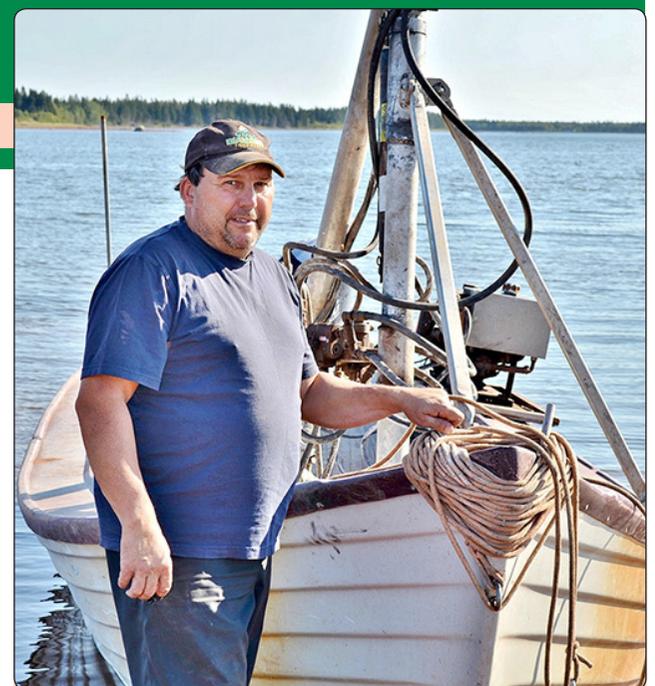
Harvesting requires long hours from dawn till dusk from fall until December. When the water begins to freeze, all oyster cages are set on the river bed, where they will wait out the winter.

“PEI oysters are in demand worldwide for their unique flavor and texture, and presentation is very important.”

Oysters are good for the environment, as they continuously filter the water in which they grow. They obtain their food by taking in phytoplankton or small bits of algae suspended in the water.

Alongside Kenneth's and his partner's leases, a floating dock is used to grade their product and house some of their equipment. The dock has a roofed area which provides some shelter from the hot sun and the cold rain.

Along the water's edge, you can see plenty of leases and floating cages holding thousands of growing shellfish. “We are a tight knit group, we oyster growers,” says Kenneth. “We work side by side all year, and we respect and support one another.”



Kenneth Arsenault

As President of the PEI Shellfish Association and a fisher himself, Kenneth promotes workplace safety and Department of Fisheries and Oceans regulations for the industry. All boat operators are required to take various training courses provided by the Holland College Marine Centre, such as:

- Small Vessel Operator course
- MED A1
- Marine First Aid

The objective of the **PEI Shellfish Association** is to develop the shell fishing industry and protect the interest of oyster fishers on PEI.

For more information, visit [www.naturallywild.ca](http://www.naturallywild.ca)



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