



Phil's Farm

Victoria BC



Always a kid

It is often said that plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery. If that's true, then Phil Christensen has sincerely flattered many people in his career as a farmer.

At Phil's Farm just north of Victoria on Vancouver Island, Phil raises hogs and pastured poultry, and grows blueberries and raspberries. Nearly all of his products are sold to the people who drop in to his farm on Oldfield Road, a strip known for farms that sell that way. Some of Phil's techniques are innovative and different, but, Phil says, they weren't all his idea. "In all honesty, almost everything I do I've copied off somebody else," Phil explains. "I've looked at people who are doing what I want to do and observed the successful ones. A good idea is a good idea."

Perhaps this approach explains why Phil has such a healthy attitude about neighbouring farms that offer the same products as he does. Regarding these farms, Phil comments, "I don't like to think of them so much as competitors. I think that we complement each other. We add depth to the market and allow the customers a little more flexibility."

One example, Phil says, are blueberries. There are three blueberry producers on Oldfield Road. Phil explains, "There's me, one guy up the road, and a place at the bottom of the hill. Each has a different microclimate, so it's much colder down the hill and a little warmer up the hill. So the blueberries on the farm at the top start first, then mine, and then the ones at the farm down at the bottom. So we spread the season out."

But Phil's Farm does have some unique features unto itself. For one, Phil is the only farmer on southern

Vancouver Island to do custom juice processing. For another, says Phil, not many southern Vancouver Island farmers, if any, produce pastured poultry. And you can bet that very few farmers have successfully converted vegetarians to meat eaters. According to Phil, you can blame the chicken for that. "Pasturing poultry produces an excellent quality chicken," comments Phil. "I have a very devout following of chicken people, and I've converted many vegetarians. Once you've been spoiled, you've been spoiled."

Phil's career as a farmer began 20 years ago when he followed his parents' example and moved out west from Alberta. Shortly after, he bought the property he still farms today from his parents. At that time, the farm was an apple orchard. After purchasing the land, Phil farmed the orchard, worked in town at an auto-parts store, and did juice processing as an ancillary enterprise.

After eight years, Phil was in a position to work fulltime on the farm. "I knew that if I could, I would definitely farm fulltime," Phil recalls. So he stopped his off-farm work and planted some blueberry bushes on his property.

He hasn't looked back since. "Everything I do is for me, so it's really easy to find motivation," Phil explains. "As well, to a

certain degree, I make more decisions about what I do. I do have responsibilities, like the chickens have to be fed by a certain time in the morning, but I also have flexibility. And it's much nicer to be a victim of things like weather and seasons than the whim of your boss."

And a victim of Mother Nature he has been. Four years into farming fulltime, the apple orchard became diseased, and all the trees had to be removed. At the time, Phil had already decided to add raspberries, but needed something else to fill the void left by the loss of the apple orchard. At a conference, he heard a speaker talk about pastured poultry and knew he had found his answer. He added chickens to his operation, and, in the spring of 2001, six bush pigs also came onboard.

Though Phil starts his day shortly after 5 am, is busy until evening with work, and doesn't get away from the farm much, Phil says he prefers it that way. "I'm basically here all the time because this is my passion," he explains. "This is what I want to do when I grow up." Laughingly, he adds, "If I could just grow up. You're only young once, but if you work really hard, you can be immature forever."

And if there's one thing that Phil does, it's work really hard. Wink, wink.

FARM FACTS

Employed –
seasonal: 3

year-round: 0

Gross Farm Sales –
\$65,000

Land Owned –
12.5 acres

Land Leased –
0 acres
