

## AGM – February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

#### Grower Presentation 1: Wilma Vreeswijk of Millefleurs

**1. Where did you get your still from?**

WILMA: We got our still from North Stills located in North York. It is stainless steel with copper fittings. Our essencia is copper and the condenser is copper. It's perfectly fine for our production. It is a fairly large still, approximately 200 litres. The still is imported from China, although the vendor is local. It works wells for us.

**2. Do you use Summer Student Assistance Programs?**

WILMA: Yes, we did. It was the only employee we had last year. We did get two students approved last year. However, here in Prince Edward County we have a lot of trouble with labour and it is very hard to hire.

**3. How did you plant the lavender, did you use a planter? Or what technique did you use there?**

WILMA: Yes, we had one of those planters that you sit behind. We laid the black mulch first which was really hard because we have a lot of gravel in our soil. We ended up having to lay our soil by hand on top of the black mulch. Then we used a planter which we rented from Dubois Agrinovation. That went relatively well. 2017 was a very rainy year so we were planting in soil which was somewhat like liquid, but it dried up right after, so the lavender did very well that year.

**4. The T-Harvester, was that something you purchased or was that a rental as well?**

WILMA: We purchased it. It was pretty expensive; I believe it was approximately \$8,000.00. We purchased it because it allowed us to continue to be a two-person operation. It is a very light harvester; one person can push it and doesn't require any strength at all. Our rows were by luck just the right length. So, when we do one row, we have enough to fill our still. It goes from the row harvesting, right into the still. Essentially that's the cycle. We do 3-4 rows per day.

**5. Last year with COVID, how many visitors did you allow on-site? What sort of hours did you keep?**

WILMA: If you had spoken to us around June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, we weren't really open. Everything opened up in Prince Edward County somewhere around the 20<sup>th</sup> of June and we had a lot of visitors. The store by regulation, there were only so many people allowed per square footage. We only had 4 people allowed in the store at a time. We had a plexi-glass partition between ourselves and the clients. We managed testers, so that everything would be safe. It really was 4 people at a time, so people were lined up in front of the building; which we didn't like. We were worried that people were too close together. We tried to keep people separate, but it was really hard. We have now changed things, so that if we have the same situation this year, we will be able to re-direct people to different parts of the farm. Our rows are pretty far apart because

they allow a lot of movement and walking, so in terms of distancing on the farm itself, we didn't really worry about that.

**6. You put in a lot, building a new building and all of the equipment, are you happy with the ROI and what you feel is the most profitable part of your business with the various aspects that you have?**

WILMA: Considering the fact that our first year, we only had half a year because of COVID our second year, the truly agri-tourism part of our business we only had half a year again. We are hoping to have our first truly full year this year [2021]. Last year, we were run off our feet. It was very busy. In terms of return on investment, it is not the individual lines, but rather the sum of the all the different business lines that is making it really work. People come in for different reasons, and they love the fact that we have a great deal of variety in terms of our products. There is a little something there for everyone. We are shifting over time into the honey wine. Hopefully, all of this combined will work out into business resilience. We are pretty happy in terms of where we are going now. We've won the entrepreneurship award for Prince Edward County this year and we were just blown away by that. We are getting a tremendous amount of support from our clients.

**Grower Presentation 2: Cathy Kirk of Essentially Lavender**

**1. You are located in a pretty remote area, in terms of the agri-tourism business, what is your experience with people travelling to get to you? How far do you find that people travel? Are they coming specifically to see you or are there other things in the area and they are making a day of it?**

CATHY: Bruce County promotes tourism. Most of the tourism happens along Lake Huron and up into the Peninsula. We are located in what they call the interior of Bruce County which is somewhat remote. We are trying to attract some of that tourism business which is always there. It's been a slow development trying to use Facebook, Instagram and our website which is not my forte, so it has been a slow build for me. People are slowly finding us. We found last year that most people came from approximately one hour away. But we did have people coming from Toronto, some from various other places that were up in the area on vacation. Some come specifically to see us and others find us because they are up here looking specifically for things to do.

**2. What would you say is your most valuable investment that you have made so far into the farm?**

CATHY: As Wilma said, it's a combination of everything. For us, it's agri-tourism. For us it's a very picturesque property that we have. People appreciate that. We try to provide a high standard of maintenance. It is basically Bill [my husband] and myself. Last year it was just the two of us, so it's a lot of work. We are hoping to have some help this year. It is also a combination of products we have for sale in the shop. Some people just come to do a tour, some people come just to buy product and some people do a combination of both things. It's to have things to attract different people for different reasons. I believe Wilma also spoke about that and I'm in agreement with that as well. The more variety you have the more people you will attract. I believe that.

**3. What percentage of your plants do you use for essential oils and what varieties are working for you?**

CATHY: It's hard to say. It was just Bill and I last year, so we did not get everything harvested as quickly as we would have liked because we do it all by hand. We do not have a harvester; our fields are only slopes and the T-Harvester is a little tricky to operate on sloped ground. As you can see, our front fields are pretty curvy. So, we have been doing it all by hand. Last year, the season started really early because it got hot fast. It also finished a little bit earlier than it normally would. With COVID, we had more visitors than we expected, so it was hard to get to everything. Ultimately, if we can get our back field fully harvested the way we would like, probably the percentage would be half and half for buds and bouquets and the other for oil.

**4. As far as weed control, some of your pictures had mulch down, what are you using? Are you using a black ground cover, covered with mulch or are you using the wood chip type mulch?**

CATHY: We do not use black ground cover mulch. That was a conscious decision on our part. I don't like the look of it and I don't like the fact that it doesn't break down. I'm a landscape architect, so I'm much more into the more natural mulches. I know there has been research done on mulching around lavender. They don't recommend organic mulch. We put the wood chips around our front beds this last year. Before we do any mulching in our back field we want to see what the result of that is after winter and getting through our spring. Fortunately, most of our land is on slopes and has really gravelly soil, so it drains really well. We're thinking that the organic mulch will work for us. Weed control up until this point has been mechanical. Either with a hoe, or my husband has a gas-powered hoe type machine that he uses in the back fields, but it's all been very hands on. Backbreaking to be perfectly honest so far.

**5. Are you making all of your own products on-site? Or are you bringing in other vendors?**

CATHY: We make all of our own lavender products on-site. I do carry some other vendors that I think have complimentary things and they would be local artisans. Because Bruce County is geographically large, but population-wise is small we are trying to support each other here as much as we can. I have somebody who does some pottery for me that has lavender on it for example. I carry some lavender tea blends produced by another lady in the county. I have some jewellery with amethysts in it created by another artisan. I have a variety of jams and cakes with our lavender in it made by another local person. Some coasters and things like that, featuring lavender and butterflies and bees and that sort of thing. That's kind of the mandate that we've adopted. We will continue with that; it seems to be working well. People who come into the shop seem to appreciate that we are trying to keep things as local as possible.

### **Final Grower Q&A Session**

**1. Do you charge admission?**

WILMA: We struggled that question with whether to charge admission. There is a larger lavender farm in Prince Edward County that charges admission in the month of July. What we did last year was we asked people to make a donation. Essentially, the admission was the donation. We ended up using the donation to support the local food bank and hospital. We thought it was going to be a really tough year for a lot of families. We wanted people to be able to enjoy the fields. We ended up collecting a lot of money for the local food bank and we were

really keen to do it. We will do admission this year. A portion of it will continue to go to the food bank. We feel it is a lot of work to have the agri-tourism, you have a lot of additional expenses. So, we will be charging admission.

CATHY: We do charge a small admission fee for people to come in and enjoy our farm. There are a couple of reasons for that. We are an agri-tourism business. We have provided other features within the farm for people to enjoy. It's our home and why would we invite people here if we aren't getting something from it? That's a business decision. So yes, we do charge people admission. With that we give people a map of the property and we have some signage around the property explaining some information about the various feature gardens that we have, our lavender, eating areas and so on. Not last year because of COVID, but previous years we have done guided tours, if booked in advance, typically on our off days because it is just Bill and I here when we are open and it's a man-power problem. We require a minimum of 8 people to do that. I've had different groups such as horticultural groups, women's groups and church groups and things like that. Those are all good ways to get people to your farm. Hopefully they have a good experience and tell other people about it. That's one of the reasons that we do that. The other thing is that in order to keep the farm at a high level of maintenance, it takes a lot of time and effort. We feel that we should be compensated in some way for that. It's for people to enjoy.

**2. Do customers pick their own lavender?**

WILMA: We do not do pick-you-own lavender. For the volume of people that we have, we do not have enough supervision and the fact that we do not have employees to supervise, we are not going with pick-you-own lavender.

**3. Do you have washrooms onsite?**

CATHY: We have a portalet that we bring in each year. I think we get fewer visitors than Wilma does, I know Prince Edward County gets huge numbers, but we don't get those kinds of numbers. That's what we use. We find that the first question I always get asked when people arrive is "Do we have a washroom?". They don't care what it is as long as it is clean and available.

WILMA: Yes, we will be bringing in a port-a-potty as well.

**4. Do you sell food and beverage onsite?**

CATHY: We sell pre-packaged drinks, water and juice onsite. We do not produce any of our own beverages at this point in time. I do sell, as I mentioned, some jam and cakes made by another licensed vendor and we sell our own honey as well.

WILMA: We do sell some food, not very much. Not a full meal for sure. We make lavender lemonade and we purchase lavender ice cream. I did for a moment, toy with the idea of making lavender ice cream. But that whole concept was too exhausting to add just one more product and one more thing to the mix. So, we purchase lavender ice cream. This year we will have our terrace at the back for wine tasting. So, we do offer wine as well. That would mean that we

would have to have some nibblies and things like that which will go with that. Nothing much. The complexity is really low in terms of what we do.

**5. How do you maintain privacy when you live on your farm?**

CATHY: We have set hours that we are open and that is posted on our sign at the entrance. When we are not open, we have a closed sign that goes up. When we are open, we also have a spinning open sign that we put up at the end of the driveway to attract people going by. A year or so ago, we also put-up rail fences, so that we can control people doing tours. So, unless you have paid to come to the farm, you don't get past the fence basically. Not to say that someone couldn't climb it if they wanted to, but it is a visual deterrent. That is what we have found that works. The best thing is to have consistent hours that people are aware of. Not to say that you don't get the odd person who comes sailing by on a day that you are not open that stops in just to check and see. We get the odd one of those, but we haven't had too many.

WILMA: Prince Edward County has been overrun with tourists. The challenges we face are that every farm, whether they are agri-tourism or not, people come up for the day and some of them don't understand the concept of private property. We do post our hours. Last year, we put up more fencing because we found that people would come right up until 9:00 at night if we didn't have fencing. We have just accepted the fact, particularly in the month of July, but also in the month of August because we also have sunflowers, that we have to be pretty vigilant about access and about people coming. I've had people come in before we open and root around so it is one of those things that you have to manage. There is a loss of privacy. If you go into agri-tourism, you have to be very firm with people and you have to be clear, but you also have to know that they are your clients and so you have to be friendly. Some people you have to chase them, that's all there is to it.

**6. What kind of debudding machine do you use?**

CATHY: We currently do not have a debudder, we do it by hand still. It is not ideal by any means, so we will be looking into a debudder this year.

WILMA: We purchased a debudder from Melissa Schooley, I don't know if she still makes them. It works perfectly well; it has these big brushes so it threads it. We lucked out because we bought a seed cleaner. We bought it on Kijiji. I remember when we bought it, we didn't have very much and I didn't know why we were buying this thing. We are very happy with it. We got the right sieve size. It cleans the buds beautifully. It goes from the thresher, right into the bud cleaner and it works well. This is not a purpose-built bud cleaner. This is a little machine that is something that farmers use to clean wheat and other kinds of products. It was just a matter of getting the right sieve size for the lavender and so it was repurposed from another type of farm.

**Regulations Q&A presented by Lee Anne Downey**

**1. When do you need to have a Food Handlers Safety course?**

LEE ANNE: If you are making low risk foods such as tea leaves, fudge or bread; you do not need to have the Food Handlers course, but if you are doing anything higher risk you do. You and your employees need to have that.

**2. What regulations are required for making lemonade and purchasing ice cream to sell?**

WILMA: For lemonade, contact the Public Health folks to inspect your kitchen and to tell you that everything is fine. We are basically re-packaging the ice cream, although I was making the lemonade myself. We are having our inspection soon actually.

LEE ANNE: The Public Health unit is actually a lot more accessible than some of the other government agencies. They are very available and there is usually lots of information on the website too.

JAN: I can speak to the ice cream. We purchase our ice cream from a goat dairy farm in Woodstock and as far as public health is concerned, they want to see it stored at -23 degrees in a freezer. They want to see a record that we have checked that temperature on a frequent basis. That is where public health stood with us. They want proof that the temperature is consistent.

**Additional Questions:**

**1. What kind of frost blanket or winter protection is needed?**

CATHY: We do not use frost blankets; we rely on snow cover.

WILMA: We use hibertex. We live in a high wind area – row covers are essential.

**2. What equipment do you need to harvest and dry the lavender?**

CATHY: We harvest our lavender using a curved bladed knife with a serrated edge.

**3. Where does the bulk of your revenue come from?**

CATHY: The bulk of our revenue comes from product sales and tour fees.

**4. Did you set up the online business yourself?**

CATHY: No, I had someone do it for me.

WILMA: We did it ourselves.

**5. Where did you purchase the debudder and how much did it cost?**

ASHLEY: We had our debudder custom made. If you would like more information, please contact Vanessa at [ontariolavenderassociation@gmail.com](mailto:ontariolavenderassociation@gmail.com).

**6. Were you a honey producer prior to starting the lavender farm?**

CATHY: No.

WILMA: Yes.

**7. What is the most valuable investment you have made?**

CATHY: The distiller and gas-powered maintenance equipment.



WILMA: Tractor.

**8. What percentage of your plants do you use for essential oils and what varieties are working for you?**

CATHY: We would like to use about ½ of our lavender for essential oil. We use Phenomenal, Hidcote, Folgate and Super Blue for oil.

WILMA: We use about ¾ of our plants for essential oil.

**9. What is the closest town?**

CATHY: Teeswater.

WILMA: Wellington.

**10. Do you make all of your products?**

CATHY: Yes, except for food products.

WILMA: 90% of our products are farm made.

**11. What are watering needs for a small field?**

CATHY: All plants must be watered when first established. Once established we only water when it is really hot and dry. We use a water tank with a hose.

WILMA: Water in mid-July. Drip irrigation.

**12. For their products, did they consult any experts; such as a chemist, etc.?**

CATHY: No, we just did lots of research.

**13. Do lavender infused bath salts (not direct application to the skin), require cosmetic product regulations?**

CATHY: Yes.

WILMA: Yes.

**14. Who do you use for insurance (specifically product insurance for the store)?**

CATHY: Our commercial/farm insurance carrier.

WILMA: Yes.

**15. How do you properly store dry lavender all year round?**

CATHY: In dark, sealed containers in a cool location.

WILMA: We also store in dark, sealed containers in a cool location.