

Farmland and Wildlife

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Interview with Mike & Susan Guichon

As members of one of Ladner's most prominent and historical families, Mike and Susan Guichon uphold a long-standing legacy of hard work and community involvement. Both Mike and Susan have spent many years growing field crops in Delta, and possess a wealth of knowledge about agriculture in our community, both past and present. The Guichons are also the recipients of DF&WT's 2016 Service Award, for their outstanding support of our "Day at the Farm" community event. In a recent interview, Mike and Susan reflected on their experience with farming in Delta, and their passion for restoring the antique tractors which are enjoyed by all at DF&WT events.

Tell us about growing up in a Delta farming Family.

MG: Growing up in a large, extended family (seven Guichon brothers and three sisters all farmed adjacent to each other in Delta, including my Dad), I had no idea that you visited with people other than relatives. In the early years of settling in Delta, our family grew a mixture of dairy, corn, hay and grain. As I grew up, potatoes were a crop commonly grown, along with hay and grain, and peas that were canned and frozen. We also produced crops for seed including sugar beet, clover and turnip seed in the 1950's. We grew flax, a rather interesting and unusual crop in Delta. It was delivered to a receiving station in Surrey where Border Feedlot is now and the flax building still stands on site to this day. The flax fiber produced linen, which was used to make parachutes during World War Two.

Did you always know you wanted to farm?

MG: I did, but my parents wanted me to get a post-secondary education first.

SG: That being said, Mike began to drive a tractor early in life. He started when he was six or seven years old.

MG: I always wanted to farm, but I did earn a Degree in Civil Engineering at Seattle University. I came back to the Delta and farmed with my Dad. Susan and I were married in 1968 and we began a life together farming.

When did you start fixing tractors? Which is your favourite?

MG: Collecting tractors may be a more accurate term than fixing tractors, however my Dad was mechanically inclined and we did all our own maintenance through the years, where I learned at his side. Even as a young boy I was interested in tractors as well as the history of the early machines used by my uncles before I was born. I was interested in keeping the old family tractors. Sometime in my 30s, I picked up two that were for sale in Lynden Washington. Susan and I have travelled all over North America to look at tractors and buying one or two on occasion—we even drove to an auction in Las Vegas.

SG: The 1928 Model D John Deere is one of

our favorites. Over 20 years ago, we brought our tractors out for the Ladner May Days Parade, and helped the Delta Farmers' Institute win first prize for their entry! We have been bringing our tractors to community events ever since. We've brought our collection to the Cammidge House, Kirkland House, events in Tsawwassen, Kerrisdale and even Lynden, Washington.

What challenges did you face when you began farming? Are there different challenges now?

MG: Our main challenge when we started farming was breaking into the markets and building quota.

Continued on next page...

Photos: Grain and hedgerows at Alksen National Wildlife Area - Jackson Lai; Mike and Susan with one of their prized tractors - The Guichon Family

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We started growing pumpkins to extend the work season for our employees into October and it developed into a worthwhile part of our operation. Our goal was always to provide quality product with good service at a reasonable price. Any fool can grow a potato, but to grow a potato, sell it and make a buck is a trick.

SG: Mike also negotiated with White Spot and Nalley's on behalf of Delta farmers for over 30 years.

MG: Farmers still face the challenge of growing a quality product at a reasonable price. Today's farmers understand the business side of things much better than years ago. Some farmers used to be protected by marketing boards, which resulted in a "buy what we give you" mentality. We always were of the mindset that you need to produce what the consumer wanted, even if it was more difficult to grow. Young farmers today are increasingly aware of what the consumer wants.

Waterfowl and farming related challenges helped lead to the formation of the Trust in 1993. Were you experiencing any issues related to wildlife grazing at that time?

MG: The worst damage at that time was done by ducks in and around the water ponding on fields in winter. Geese weren't as common; their numbers are much larger now than they were back then. The

biggest impact that the Trust had for us was the land leveling initiative. Land leveling was done in our family from the time that my grandfather, Laurent, diked land from the tides with hand labor. It was done with horses, steam tractors and later with gas and diesel tractors. Those efforts pale in comparison with today's laser controlled machines. Along with weed control, leveling is the single greatest change to increase crop production in Delta.

If you were to predict what agriculture in Delta will look like in 20 years, what do you expect we'd see?

MG: The future is bright for young farmers – which turns and twists it may take, I don't know. All farmers have challenges; it doesn't matter how big or small, we all face them. It's important for people to know that young farmers, like the generations that came before them, protect the environment and the quality of life in Delta. Our fields are part of the environment and it's a community. Our crop residues provide feed for waterfowl, which is a message that needs to be shared with the public. This is part of the reason why we support "Day at the Farm." It's critical to bridge the interface between agriculture and urban society. When families with children have an opportunity to dig their own spuds out of the ground, it is a much more dramatic experience than watching a potato harvester. The young ones won't forget their 'Day At The Farm' experience. 

"Our Roots, Our Future" Fundraiser a Success

On June 17, 2016, DF&WT held its biennial Summer Solstice Fundraiser at Roddick's Century old barn on Westham Island. "Our Roots, Our Future" was chosen as the event theme in recognition of the important role farmland plays in providing fresh, local food, but also for its contribution towards maintaining a sustainable, healthy environment for generations to come.

Chefs Bruno Marti and JC Felicella, along with Culinary Team BC, prepared an epicure feast from local produce. Two awards were presented: Mike and Susan Guichon received the Service award for their longtime support of the Trust's "Day at the Farm" community event and other initiatives. Ducks Unlimited Canada was awarded the Trust's Special Recognition Award for providing more than twenty years of support for the DF&WT Stewardship Programs. The event raised net proceeds of over \$45,000, which will benefit the Winter Cover Crop Stewardship Program. A heartfelt thank you to all the businesses and individuals in the community who support our work. We also wish to thank our team of volunteers who helped make this event a success!



Top right: Mike and Susan Guichon

Bottom right: Dan Buffett, DUC and DF&WT Director Brent Harris

DF&WT/UBC Wild Bee Habitat Project

Martina Clausen, UBC Masters Student



Insects are the chief pollinators of crops and wild plants. Surprisingly, certain crops, such as blueberries, are better pollinated by wild bee species than by honey bees. For farmers in Delta, where berries are among the most dominant crop types, wild bees offer efficient pollination services even in difficult weather conditions. Unfortunately, wild bee populations have declined greatly in recent years, mostly due to the loss of natural habitats that offer food and nesting resources. Managed honey bees cannot compensate fully for the loss of wild pollinators and often can't be supplied in sufficient numbers to meet pollination demand.

The importance of wild bees has been underestimated for centuries, and steps to protect natural habitats, where wild bees can thrive, are not only in farmers' best interests, but in society's as well. DF&WT has recognized the value of wild pollinators, as their Hedgerow Stewardship Program continues to integrate native plants onto the margins of farm fields for agronomic benefits and provision of diverse wildlife habitats.

When I began my graduate studies with the Sustainable Agricultural Landscapes Lab at UBC in January, 2015, I knew very little about bees. I moved to Vancouver from Switzerland with a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Engineering and the vague idea of pursuing research in the field of Agriculture and Biodiversity. Luckily, my lab had been successfully collaborating with DF&WT in several projects, so I became familiar with the organization's work. I began to explore the Hedgerow Stewardship Program, as little was known about the effect of the program on local bee communities.

The questions I posed with my research project are: **which wild bee species live in Delta's farmlands? And which habitat supports bees best in offering a continuous suite of diverse flowers throughout the season?**

Between May and August 2015, I collected bees with nets and pan traps in remnant hedgerows, planted hedgerows and grass margins. Furthermore, I assessed plant species richness and flower abundance in each habitat and registered all plant

species on which bees were caught, in order to create a plant-ranking list. Over the summer season, I sampled over 480 bees. With the help of Karen Needham, the curator of the Entomological Collection at the Beaty Biodiversity Museum and Dr. Elizabeth Elle from SFU, those bees were processed, pinned and identified so they can be integrated in the museum's collection. The majority was compromised by both honey and bumble bees, complemented with a variety of other genera occurring in smaller numbers (for example: the shiny metallic green sweat bee (*Agapostemon* sp.), which is pictured on the right).



Interestingly, the highest bee diversity and abundance was found in grass margins, which corresponded with the highest plant species richness and flower abundance.

The most visited plant species were tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca*), followed by Himalayan Blackberries (*Rubus discolor*) and Nootka Rose (*Rosa nutkana*).



Martina Clausen

These first results show that floral resources support bee communities in agricultural landscapes. Grass margins in particular have a large potential to be managed and maintained in a way to ensure bee abundance and diversity. Results further indicate that plants selected for habitat conservation must be chosen appropriately in order to not simply increase populations of common pollinator species. The plant-ranking list could be an important tool to plan vegetation plantings that are targeted at specific rare wild bee species.

The data collected from both my 2015 and 2016 field seasons will assist the DF&WT in their efforts to implement habitat conservation activities that benefit wild bees, biodiversity and farmers. My collaboration with DF&WT has been very rewarding and I am happy to contribute research that supports the work of the organization and local farmers.

Through working in Delta over the summer season, I not only learned a lot about bees, but also farming systems and how local food is being grown. Coming from Switzerland, I appreciate the opportunity to connect with the people and the land that surrounds my new chosen home. Stopping at a farm stand at the end of a long field day to enjoy a fresh berry milkshake and stock up on local produce is a highlight I will fondly remember.

Join us for the 11th Annual "Day at the Farm" Event at the Westham Island Herb Farm!

When: September 10, 2016

Where: 4690 Kirkland Road, Ladner, BC

Bring the whole family out to experience all that our local farming community has to offer! Don't forget to bring your best batch of homemade scones for our Local Scone Contest (judged at the show stage at noon!). Farm Credit Canada will be on site to collect non-perishable items for the food bank!



Bats and Farmlands in the Lower Fraser Valley

South Coast Bat Conservation Society

Do you have bat activity on your farm? Or a bat colony on your property? If so, please contact the South Coast Bat Conservation Society (SCBATS). With your help, we can monitor and study bats in the Fraser Valley. Our goals are to identify opportunities to enhance on-farm bat habitat, assess the ecological services provided to farms and assess opportunities to improve crop health and yield. Bats provide valuable ecosystem services to the our local farm fields. They provide natural pest control, consuming up to their body weight in insects each night. To our knowledge, no research has investigated bat activity over agricultural land in the Lower Fraser Valley. However, research in the United States estimated savings of USD\$22.9 billion per year annually to the U.S. agriculture industry (in



terms of pest suppression services provided by bats).

It is important to act now, because a devastating disease is wiping out bat populations across North America. The

disease, known as white-nose syndrome (WNS), has killed over 6 million bats since 2006. SCBATS needs your help. If you have any information regarding bat colonies or activity, or would like to participate in an agricultural study please contact SCBATS at info@scbats.org



Wildlife Tidbits by John Hatfield

During my younger days, quite a long time ago, I did a lot of hiking and camping. The tents in those days very seldom came with a floor. This allowed the occasional visit by small creatures into our tents. We always rolled our sleeping bags out on rubber sheets on the ground. I still remember being awoken with a start, when I realized that a large frog was jumping across my face. I can still feel its wet, sticky and cold feet!

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