

AGRICULTURE - Peat Harvesting,  
Earliest Cranberries and Blueberries  
No. 8 Road and River Road.

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Interviewed: June 6, 1973.

Born - February 28, 1913 at Montreal. Attended schools there and McGill University . . . came to U.B.C. for final year, graduating as B.A.Sc. . . . married a Vancouver girl . . . returned to Montreal for a few years . . . 1941 returned to Vancouver . . . had been turned down from joining the air force because he was married with two children . . . at Vancouver met George Smith and John Daly and joined them as shareholder in Northern Peat Company Ltd. . . . returned to Montreal and was accepted in the Air Force . . . served 4 years . . . 1945 became active in Northern Peat . . . municipal by-law allowed to take off 3 inches of peat moss . . . faced problem: what to do then with peat land . . . answer: grow blueberries or cranberries.

1945 - met an American lawyer with cranberry farm at Long Beach, Washington who had gone into cranberries as tax dodge and was running 100 acre cranberry farm (largest in the west) at a cost of \$500,000.

Earliest Cranberry Start - 1946 - in spring Bell visited lawyer Myers and saw the farm . . . everyone excited as that year they (as growers) got 32 cents a pound for cranberries as compared to 10 cents or 11 cents a pound for cranberries today . . . supplied vines and advice . . . Bell's group got the vines . . . cleared 3 acres of land still containing peat . . . fall of 1946 planted at No. 8 Road and River Road. Believes first cranberry acreage planted in western Canada was Bell's.

Only other operator was Mrs. Smith who grew 1/4 acre cranberries on a little farm at Westminster Highway and No. 5 Road and sold them on roadside stand.

On first harvest the cranberries were very lush . . . offered berries to Woodwards - not interested because they had ordered Cape Cod cranberries . . . Royal City Cannery objected to canning the berries . . . wrote to National Cranberry Association.

1949 - National Cranberry Association delegation came to see them . . . included in the delegation - Mr. Marcus Urann, U.S. dean of cranberries and his associates. . . asked Bell's group to join the Association and they did. Cranberry growing in Massachusetts goes back over 150 years.

National Cranberry subsequently became Ocean Spray.

Two main co-operatives were: National Cranberry Association specialized in jellied cranberries (soft, whole and jellied soft) . . . and Eatmore Cranberry Group specialized in fresh fruit sale . . . they merged 20 years ago and became Ocean Spray, the company Bell Farms belongs to now . . . it markets the berries . . . which are cleaned and screened at B.C. Blueberry Co-op facilities, Richmond.

Ocean Spray is a growers co-operative . . . about 85% of U.S. growers belong and 95% of Canadian growers.

1949 - Strawberry boll weevil got into the cranberries . . . help from Dr. J. Crowley, of the Research Station, Long Beach, Washington in identifying the insect . . . most spraying for insects done by air . . . absolutely necessary for cranberry survival.

Cranberry Industry progress: 1946 - national average was 3,000 lbs per acre . . . Bell Farms first production was 10,000 pounds per acre. Quality of soil resulted in much better yields than the eastern states . . . since then new sprays and new methods of treating insects are

used so average everywhere is around 9,000 pounds per acre. On Lulu Island cranberries average over 15,000 pounds per acre.

Primary production generally measured in barrels - one barrel is 100 pounds.

Cranberry market - wholly in United States and Canada. Ocean Spray spent thousands of dollars advertising cranberry sauce but general acceptance remained for turkey at Thanksgiving and Christmas and sometimes with chicken. Sales increased tremendously in development of new products: cranberry juice cocktail and cranapple cocktail - a mixture of cranberry juice and apple juice. These two products use up more cranberries than the sauce. In U.S. cranberry consumption is one pound per capita. In B.C. cranberry consumption is less than half a pound per capita.

This summer B.C. is producing 100,000 barrels (10 million pounds) of cranberries and will rise to 15 million pounds. Total Canadian consumption is half, i.e. 7 million pounds so necessary to export cranberries . . . most B.C. growers are members of Ocean Spray Co-op.

Price was 15 cents a pound for many years, but 3 years ago a vast overproduction occurred and price dropped to 10 cents a pounds . . . slowly coming back and expect 12 cents a pound in 1973.

In B.C. four large growers of cranberries produce 90% of Canadian production . . . 20 smaller growers produce remaining 10 percent.

Cranberry Growing is highly mechanized industry . . . involves a great deal of water engineering . . . must sprinkle the cranberries starting in March to prevent freezing of buds . . . Dr. Crowley developed sprinkling system . . . effect is that when the water above 32° comes in contact with bud and temperature at ground level is less than 32° it freezes . . . when water freezes it gives out

heat of fusion which actually warms up the cranberry preventing it being frozen. When harvesting (fall) if frost severe i.e. 22° above zero cranberries turn rubbery . . . this is prevented by turning on sprinkler . . . as long as water and ice are together temperature stays at 32° and no harm done.

Flood Harvesting - starts September 15 and ends in October . . . 3 to 4 acre field is flooded 12 inches deep. Men walk through field with machines which look like miniature ferris wheels and are power driven . . . berries are knocked loose and float to surface . . . men with long boom sticks float cranberries to one part of field . . . cranberries pumped into dump truck then taken to Co-op plant for cleaning, screening . . . Bell Farms first to pump cranberries off field. Other growers - (1) use float system, but with tiny portable conveyors which elevate cranberries into trucks which go to screening plant, (2) dry pick method, using machine like wooden combs . . . comb through leaf, drop on conveyor belt, then into little box. Must keep pressure off cranberry vines, , , trucks, etc. damage . . . so only people allowed to walk on cranberry field . . . take small 30 pound boxes of cranberries, dump into tote holding 700 pounds and airlift tote box by helicopter. Bell Farms does not use helicopter.

Cranberries ripen all at same time. Blueberries ripen different times and require 4 or 5 pickings.

Bell Farms has about 200 acres of cranberries. Northern Peat has 100 acres of blueberries.

1968: B.C. established cranberry marketing board to (1) limit production because of great overproduction pending in Canada and U.S. and (2) avoid subsequent drop in price below the recent 10 cents a pound.

Cranberries are still a low cost farm product . . . price of cranberries is cheaper than any other berry or fruit on the market . . . strawberry growers get 20 cents a pound . . . blueberry growers get over 20 cents a pound . . . cherries, apples, etc. give a better deal than cranberries . . . Jack Bell compares harvesting of cranberries with apples.

Bell plans no cranberry acreage enlargement because Board prohibits increasing growers sale above a quota to be established in 1974 based on previous years production . . . the method: take 2 best years of cranberry production since 1968 and divide by 2 . . . this will be each company's quota in cranberries.

Theory is: each year U.S. will establish what they feel they can sell, what the total quota is, and tell each grower they'll only accept 80% or 90% of what they can sell from each farmer . . . same thing will apply in Canada.

Re Bill 42 - Cranberries. Bell Farms location at No. 8 Road and River Road has been frozen since 1968 when Richmond Municipality passed zoning areas by-law . . . this location established as farm land . . . aim to avoid urban sprawl.

Enactment of provincial land freeze (1973) does not bother their blueberry or cranberry land holdings. Also hold several hundred acres of peat land not suitable for growing either blueberries or cranberries - frozen.

Hope Land Commission will unfreeze peat land not growing cranberries Only use for non-growing peat land - build houses on or sanitary Land fill.

Staff - Bell Farms grows cranberries and employs 4 to 5 people year-round . . . during harvest employs 20 for one month.

Jack Bell

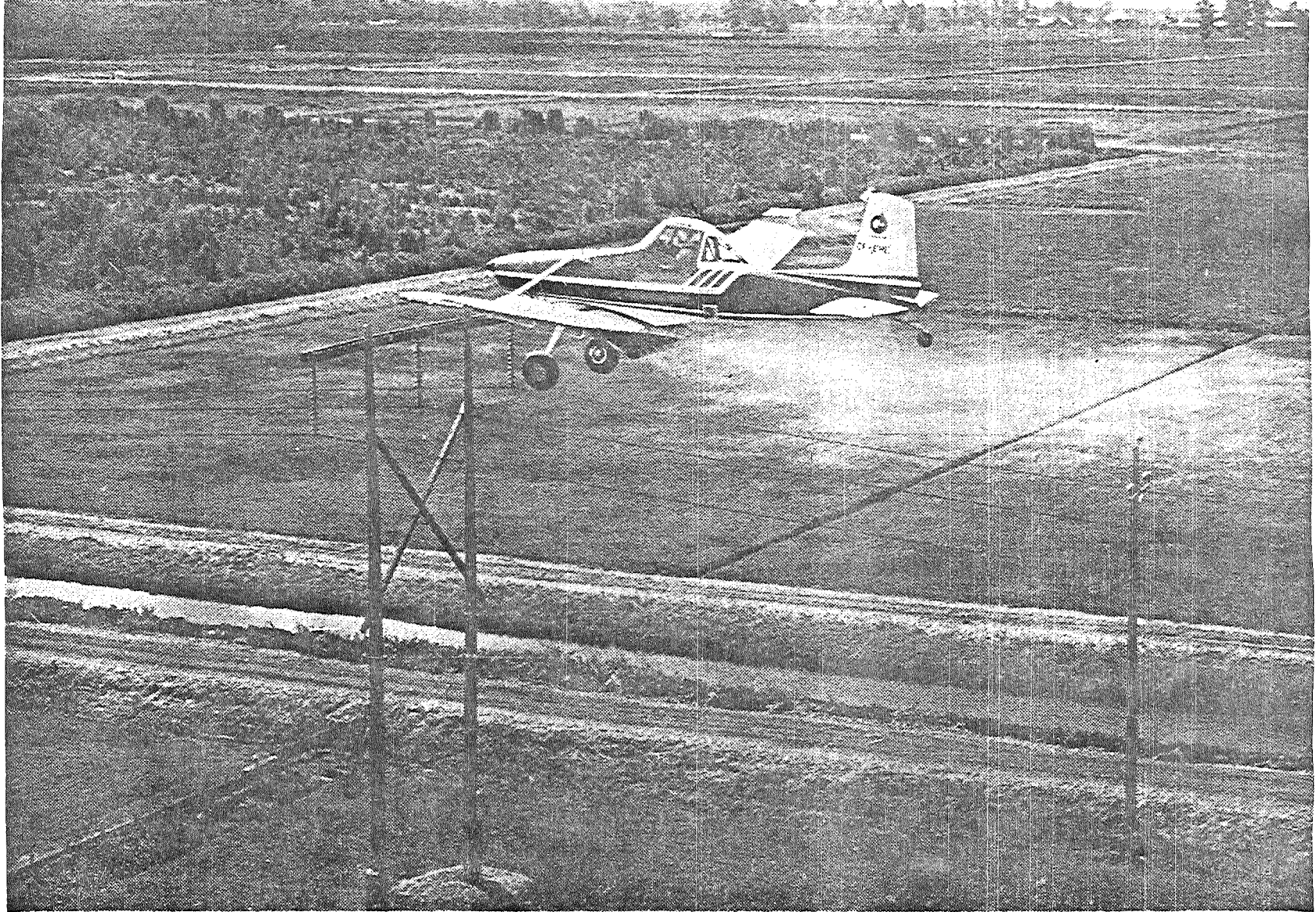
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Northern Peat grows blueberries.

Two separate companies - two different sets of shareholders.

D. Cleland

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**SPEEDY FERTILIZER-SPREADER**, low-flying plane skims over power poles at 100 m.p.h. as it sprays 170 acres of cranberries

on Bell Farm in Richmond. Pilot Robert Smith says Cessna can spread 1,000-pound load in about five minutes.

—Deni Eagland Photo