

Hartmann's Family History



Edward and Catherine Hartmann (Dennis' grandparents) were born in Chicago in 1906. They were well-liked by everyone. Edward's father, Fred M. Hartmann, and mother, Rose Proesel, were both of German extraction but born in the U.S. Catherine's father, John Kolberg was Norwegian, and her mother, Delia Gibbons came from Ireland.

In 1944 Edward bought the 56-acre blueberry farm in Lacota, Michigan for \$10,000 with money he had to borrow because he had no money of his own. Part of the \$10,000 he borrowed from his mother, another part from a Proesel uncle who owned a jewelry store in Chicago. The farm house had 3 bedrooms upstairs and a single bathroom inside the house and an outhouse in back.

When they moved to the farm and started to raise blueberries they had no idea about costs. Pat Sr. (Dennis' father) remembers when a 12-pint case of blueberries brought \$3.00 on the wholesale market.

Picking per pint .67 per case
Cardboard pint box .11
Wood case .16
Cellophane and rubber band .06
Shed help packing .05
TOTAL COST \$1.05
Profit per case \$1.95

All of the Hartmann blueberries were sold fresh the first three years. Then Michigan Fruit Canners gave canning a try and that changed things for us here in Michigan giving us access to a process market.

During the first 10 years of farming we never sprayed for anything. Today, we spray about every 10 days.

Pat Sr. married when he was 23. He was a hard worker and had a large family – 6 children: Dan, Pat, Patrice, Jim, Dennis and Ann.

In 1944 Pat Sr. bought a 40-acre farm at the intersection of 60th and Crow School Road from Frank Hambley for \$50 per acre – a total of \$2000. Patrice, Dennis's sister owns that farm today. It was a swamp with a ¼ mile ditch that had been filled in and was not working. Pete Lull sold Pat Sr. about 15 cases of dynamite. He buried the sticks of dynamite 1 foot apart and after two attempts, he had a ditch over 6 feet deep and broke a lot of windows in the neighborhood.

Even though Pat had his own farm, he and Ed were busy drilling wells for irrigation. Everyone would get up in the middle of the cold night to move the aluminum pipes over wet bushes to irrigate fields. Being awakened from deep sleep in the middle of the night to go out and get soaking wet pushing your way through bushes was real torture.

The year Pat purchased the farm from his dad (1972) they experienced the worst frost ever. Pat had expected 100 tons and ended up with only 7. He couldn't pay his dad so he borrowed \$10,000 from WMSB (West Michigan Savings Bank). Pat then purchased the Donnic farm on 102nd and 60th and lived in the house on the land for about 10 years. He planted 10 acres of blueberries. Then he sold it and bought the Taklo farm, 1000 sq. ft. house, and a tractor for \$35,000. It had 15 acres of planted blueberries. Then, his dad and he bought the Stanley Dusic farm across the street.

In 1975, Hartmanns purchased Dr. Arthur Elliot's farm in Earlton, Florida. Along with Dr. Elliot's initial varieties on the farm that Dr. Elliot had developed for his breeding program in conjunction with the University of Florida, New Southern High Bush varieties were developed and released throughout the South East and areas around the world. This established breeding program of the Southern High Bush was the foundation for the successful growth of the blueberries in southern growing regions.

The Hartmann families are truly pioneers in the blueberry industry, always looking to improve horticulture practices, invent new machinery, or educate area farmers.

- Pat's dad bought the first mechanical picker for \$35,000. They picked for Broe, Wally, Jackson, and all of their own farms.

- Pat built the first water line for cleaning blueberries. Others soon copied it and it is still in use today in modified form.
- Pat sold drip irrigation for Dick Chapin – the first time anyone in our area tried it. It was a hard sell then because it was new way of irrigating but today everyone uses it.
- Pat also built the first greenhouse for propagating blueberries. It was a balloon inflated by exterior fans. Stanley Johnston, the famous South Haven Experiment Station botanist and good friend, told him it would not work. When he saw that it did, he wrote a letter congratulating Pat. Attached you will find the letter.
- Pat was the first propagator to use the band saw to prepare cuttings. Before that, they used shears to cut them one-by-one and spent many days and evenings doing it.
- Back in the day blueberries were packed by hand into the pints. Pat built the first mechanical packer. The concept for that method still exists today.
- Pat devised a wheel for marking out rows to be planted with blueberry bushes.
- Pat built the first heated benches in our greenhouses and introduced misting. Both changes meant that they speed up the propagation cycle.

Pat had collected and propagated new plants for years. He produced thousands of “miracle fruit” bushes years ago from plants he got from the Miami millionaire Whitman, who became one of his closest friends.

Dennis’ father passed away in 2010 but the Hartmann legacy continues on through those lives that he enriched by his vast knowledge of the Mighty Blueberry and several farming operations related to growing and raising blueberries by his children.

