



Tracy and Holly Campbell at the couple's Berry Farm in Bethlehem.

Berry Happy Together: Tracy and Holly Campbell of 'Campbells Berry Farm'

Should you happen to be out Telephone Exchange Road around the middle of June, you're likely to be tempted. Round, plump blueberries will be calling to you like succulent little Sirens. Dark and juicy, how can you resist the urge to pop one in your mouth and savor its summertime sweetness? Tracy and Holly Campbell have lovingly planted and tended literally thousands of bushes, and soon each will be heavily laden with hundreds of the little blue darlings.

Layne: Where are y'all from originally?

Tracy: Originally from here. Raised right here on this place. I think I'm the fifth generation that's owned and farmed this land.

Layne: And I understand that you lived over on the coast for a while as well?

Tracy: Yes, I had a charter boat business there. I probably did that around 25 years, and finally, my back was doing about all it could do. We sold my boat and business and we moved back here. I used to farm growing up and then I was in business for myself farming, and did 500 to 600 acres at a time, mostly soybeans and corn. I did that here and leased a lot of land. But base camp was right here.

Layne: And how about you Holly?

Holly: Well I'm originally from New Hampshire. But I've lived in the South for 26 years. Tracy and I met at the coast. And my dad was a blueberry farmer in Vermont. Dad even wrote recipe books for different fruits which we'll be selling, along with a children's book that I

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wrote about a blue bear named 'Blueberry.' My dad asked me to write that. So, we're carrying on my dad's legacy here a little bit. And so, when my dad got sick, I went up there to help him out on the farm and Tracy came up when he could. And then the following year, after he'd passed away, I went up to run the farm with Tracy's help when he could get up there while we were trying to sell the property.

But Tracy and I just really enjoyed the blueberry farming and when he sold the charter boat business we decided to come back here. This land was all grown up. His grandmother used to live right there. We were doing something out here one day— now he tells the story one way and I tell it another! (Laughter)— he said that I said, 'Wouldn't this make a pretty blueberry farm?' And now I say that he said it! But whatever! One of us said it! And here we are. It was go big or go home, so now we have 2,700 blueberry plants.

Layne: Wow! That's a lot of blueberries! And on how many acres?

Tracy: Well, there's about six acres in blueberries.

Layne: How long ago was it that you made the decision to start growing blueberries here?



Last year's berries soaking up the sun. This year's crop should be ready around the middle of June.

Tracy: Well, I sold the boat in the end of July 2015. And we had decided to do this by that point. I came back here and started to clear this land off to get ready.

Holly: It was pretty much all grown up like you see around the perimeter.

Tracy: And in December of 2015, we started setting bushes out.

Holly: 1,500 the first year. They were two-year-old bare root plants.

Tracy: The first year, we cut all the blooms off. We had such good growth on the plants in 2016, we felt like the next year we'd let them have at it. We didn't have a big pile, but might of picked 600 pounds.

Holly: We had so many that we ended up

doing the farmer's market in Taylorsville with them. But this year we're gearing up to have the public to come pick.

Tracy: Hopefully we'll have enough folks to come in and pick them. I don't want to pick them! (Laughter). I put around 2,700 irrigation drippers out, so that's about how many bushes we have out currently.

Holly: Our irrigation system is creek fed from the property that we own. We have a pump system.

Tracy: The first year, if we hadn't of had the irrigation system on them, we would have probably lost half of them. It was dry that summer. But the whole time I was growing up here, I've never seen that creek dry. There are a couple of springs that feed it. It's not a great big creek, but it's steady. Maybe 3,000 gallons a minute come down it.

Holly: We pump the water up into this 5,000-gallon water tank. And water every couple of days.

Tracy: We use around 2,000 gallons to water them each time.

Layne: And I see you've built yourself a nice berry-house here. I guess that's what you'd call it?

Tracy: Tool-shed, doghouse. (Laughter).

Layne: Tracy, is that where you live when you're in trouble?

Holly: I told him all you need is a hammock and a refrigerator, and you could live down here! And

he was like, 'What are you trying to say?' (Laughter).

Tracy: We were trying to make it look like an old style 'baccar barn.

Holly: Eventually, we want to have some sort of a sitting porch here. We really want to make it a destination place. A place for families to come and bring a picnic lunch and spend some time away from electronics. Just enjoy the outdoors. We'll grow some crops for sale too, like some corn, okra, and cucumbers.

Tracy: We aren't going to do a whole lot of vegetables. Just enough so we'll have something for when they come to pick.

Holly: We had the NC State Blueberry Specialist come. He's been here a couple of times. But the most recent time he came in 2016, he was just so impressed with how few bushes we had lost. He said, 'Y'all are doing the right things!' I credit Tracy and his farm knowledge. You know like mounding up and irrigating.

Layne: Well knowing what you're doing does come in handy I hear.

Tracy: (Laughter). A little bit!

Holly: We've made some mistakes, but... we compliment each other with our skill sets. We're working on our webpage and the marketing and all too. It's just hard to find the time.

Layne: Well my wife and I just love blueberries. They are so good for you.

Holly: Yes, that's another reason we got into blueberries, they're not going to go out of style. As long as we can keep them producing, people will always want them. They freeze well. You can cook all winter long with them. Make jams and jellies, wine. They are just so

versatile.

Layne: What kinds of blueberries do you grow?

Tracy: We've got six different varieties and they are staggered as to when they produce fruit. That way we can have berries here for people to pick for a longer time. We think our grand opening will be around the middle of June.

Layne: Sounds great. What's been the most challenging part about the blueberry business so far?

Tracy: Weeds. Keeping up with them. Like I said, the ground here was grown up so badly. And when I started tilling it again, all the weeds came back to life. You think you've got them knocked down, and then they come up again.

Layne: What has been the most rewarding part?

Tracy: I just like to see things grow. Sometimes I see weeds that are so pretty, I don't really want to kill them even.

Holly: For me, I think the most rewarding part is working together as a team. And seeing your hard labor come to fruition. Getting to work outside in this beautiful creation that God has given us, and to be able to use your hands and see the rewards. But working together as a team where we have different strengths and skills. We work together very well and it's fun to go to work together every day. Hopefully he feels the same way about me.

Layne: Say 'Yes' Tracy!

Tracy: Yes Dear. (Laughter).

Layne: He does know what he's doing! ●

Find out when the berries are ripe through the 'Campbells Berry Farm' Facebook page or give them a shout at 252-422-2900.



The Campbells hope to make their berry farm a destination.



A sampling of last year's crop