



Headline: Atlantic Company Brings Safety to Work and School

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Oxford Frozen Foods, is widely known as the world’s largest processor of wild blueberries but lesser known is the company’s stellar commitment to safety.

Based in Oxford, Nova Scotia, the company’s reputation for agricultural safety began with efforts in the workplace but now those efforts have spread out into surrounding Atlantic communities too. David Powers, the company’s Director of Health, Safety and the Environment, says strong support from upper management goes a long way in making his efforts successful.

“I’ve worked in many companies in my almost 25-year safety career and I feel that safety is taken seriously at Oxford,” Powers says. “Our senior management is terrific.”

As the director of safety initiatives within the company, Powers says they are challenged to address safety hazards in their processing facilities but also on affiliated farms. “There’s a lot of similarities between the two, but obviously farming has some challenges that a plant or factory wouldn’t have,” he explains. Working alone serves as a good example he says. “In a facility, you’re rarely working alone, there’s always someone else around you but working out in the fields, you could be the only one for miles around.” He says another considerable risk on their farming operations is fatigue management. Powers likes to promote solutions to risks like these by making simple changes. What worked best for their farms was to minimize these risks through scheduling.

“We have changed our schedule both in Canada and the US to give most workers a day off in the week,” he explains. “Takes a little bit of work and convincing that’s the way to go, but we’ve been doing that for the last couple of years and it’s been a huge success.”

Powers is modestly reluctant to share that ‘lost time’, as a result of injuries, reached zero at the Oxford site in 2012 and has stayed there for three years. “Statistics are lagging indicators and you don’t want to hang your hat up on lagging indicators,” he says, “it’s more important that we can go into a harvest season or even a re-pack season with safety systems.” Powers is quick to point out that it’s really been the commitment of the supervisors and employees that work for Oxford Foods that puts these safety systems in place, keeping that lost time at bay.



But in no way is employee commitment more evident than during Oxford’s annual Progressive Agriculture Safety Day®. What started as a simple agricultural safety fair for Oxford school kids in 2011 has grown to a much grander scale. Powers says that in 2015, the company will host three safety days in Nova Scotia, one in PEI, one in New Brunswick, and one in Maine. “We anticipate reaching approximately 1500, Grade 4 and Grade 5 students this year with that program,” he says. “It’s a free day for the schools and we take care of everything.”

Not only does the program rely on the financial support of the employ but Powers says employees even help run the event. During safety days, Robert Mannette, Oxford Food’s Information Technology specialist, is most likely to be found operating the virtual fire extinguisher. As someone who started with the very first fair in 2011, Mannette admits the events do make for some long days of setting up but he believes there’s a lot of value in what they’re doing. “The kids are engaged, they’re learning, and they’re having fun,” he says. Troy Miller, Oxford’s Engineering Specialist and a past chaperone for one classroom in attendance, agrees that the safety day is well received by the kids. “It’s extremely well received by the children,” Miller says. “There’s a lot of interactive things going on... and the PTO demonstration is fantastic, all the kids loved that, especially the boys,” he chuckles. Miller says his son will be the next one to attend the safety day, as the tradition continues for another group of classmates. Both Miller and Mannette says it’s just one more initiative to be proud of as employees of Oxford Frozen Foods.

Cutlines

Oxford 1: Oxford Frozen Foods is widely known as the world’s largest processor of wild blueberries.

Oxford 2: Oxford Frozen Foods shows their commitment to farm safety in their community through Progressive Agriculture Safety Day® events.

