

Langton resident guides future of goji berries

NANCY BOUTIN
Sun Media

If goji berries take off in Ontario, Mary Szucsko will be among those to thank.

Szucsko was recently named Wolfberry AgroDevCo's representative for Ontario, eastern Canada and the eastern United States.

Wolfberry AgroDevCo is a Saskatchewan-based company that, under the direction of Terry Switenky, has been trying to market goji berries through contract growers across Canada.

Szucsko first heard about the company through the Western Ontario Farmer publication, and in the summer of 2008, she and husband Vendel planted two acres of the crop on their farm outside of Langton.

In the intervening months, Szucsko was in contact with Switenky several times. Knowing the company's headquarters is in Saskatchewan, Szucsko said she thought it would be beneficial to have a company representative closer to home to serve growers in the region.

In her new role, Szucsko will act on behalf of Wolfberry AgroDevCo to deliver products and associated programs to growers joining the industry in eastern Canada. She will specialize in small plot (two acres or less) development.

"Anyone who knows me knows I don't get into anything I'm not sure of," said Szucsko in a phone interview. "We're cautious, and we make decisions based on lots of research and information."

Although goji berries are something of a leap from tobacco, Szucsko said the potential in Canada is, well, ripe.

"I can see there's a lot of opportunity here," she said.

Though used as a nutritive food in China for thousands of years, it's only recently that people on this side of the pond are beginning to pay attention to goji berries and their potential.

The small, elongated, orange-red, berries have been dubbed a super food by some, thanks largely to the berries' nutrient-packed makeup. The berries also contain high levels of antioxidants, which help protect the body by neutralizing disease-causing free radicals and regulating the immune system. The plant's root

can be used medicinally, and even the leaves make a tasty and healthy tea.

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