

# Windmill Hill - an insight in the IBA President's farm



**Anthony Snell, President of the International Blackcurrant Association since June 2016, opens the**



**doors of his farm for us.**

**Professionalism, perfection and experience in Herefordshire, UK.**

*Visited in March 2017*



The first impression of a visitor at Windmill Hill in Western England will be “WOW”. And it will also be the last impression, after having a deep look into Anthony Snell’s business. As it proudly shows on banners, Windmill Hill is where you will get the “berry” best from Herefordshire.



For many years, Anthony Snell and his wife Christine have been running the family business in beautiful hilly and green Herefordshire. Berries are their speciality, and among these: blackcurrants. Anthony has a field manager for the strictly agronomic part of his business, but keeps an eye on everything - and knows everything about blackcurrants.

**“Blackcurrant production must meet the demand of the market”**

## **says Anthony Snell**

Anthony's blackcurrant farm is of average size - and average in the UK means 70 - 100 hectares. He is one of the 8 blackcurrant growers in Herefordshire, who are part of the British Blackcurrant Foundation. The other members of the foundation, in total around 40 blackcurrant farmers in the whole United



Kingdom, grow their blackcurrants for the needs of Ribena. This represents 90% of the crop in the country. Ribena, a blackcurrant based British soft drink brand owned today by Suntory, contracts the blackcurrant growing for their needs with British growers.

## **The “Ribena-system”**

The contract between Ribena and the British Blackcurrant Foundation is the basis for good relationships between growers and processors. Here, the production corresponds to the needs, and everybody is happy: a certain price level is fixed approximately within a contract that lasts for seven years. Prices are, of course, adjusted after the harvest, according to the quality of the currants. But it ensures the growers to sell their currants, and it ensures Ribena good growing conditions for “their” currants.





Anthony buys blackcurrant cuttings of “Ribena varieties” from a certified producer. And he only plants a certain amount of blackcurrants, paying royalties for the amount of cuttings he plants. “Last year, I had to remove blackcurrants from some areas (variety Ben Hope), because I produced too much”, explains Anthony. Five times a year, Harriet Roberts, agronomic adviser from LRS (Lucozade Ribena Suntory), visits every farmer. Together with a newsletter that she sends twice a month, this part of the contract. It helps the growers with professional agronomic advice.

## Organic blackcurrants from Windmill Hill



Where there is no place for “Ribena”-blackcurrants, Anthony grows organic. Blackcurrants of variety Ben Tirran represent 20% of the total area. Here, hand weeding and hand fertilizing is taking over from spraying and work with huge machines for the first 2



years of the plantation. The strict respect of organic growing methods will guarantee a good yield - which is half of the conventional yield. “In conventional growing, 7 tonnes per hectare is a good average”, says Anthony.

Windmill Hill sells its organic blackcurrants to companies who make organic yogurts or cordial, for example. But this is not all: Anthony has his own storage and packing facilities for IQF berries - and he sells them online.

## The “berry” best from Herefordshire



Apart from blackcurrants, Windmill Hill produces



raspberries (40ha), a thousand tonnes of strawberries a year, together with some blueberries, chuckleberries and blackberries. During the harvesting season, around 300 seasonal staff join the permanent workers. They come from Bulgaria, Romania or Poland, and Anthony and Christine are very concerned by their well-being. They provide accommodation in mobile homes on the farm for some of them, and they have their football and tennis facilities for spare time activities.





During the tour of the farm, Anthony gives some details about his blackcurrant farming. “Ben Alder is the variety which has the best yield here with 4t/acre (10t/hectare). It is a very consistent variety”, explains Anthony. “We have an average of 600mm of rain per year. When we plant

cuttings, we keep them under polythene for the first 3 years. This is part of the recommendation of Ribena: it keeps weeds away and moisture in. We keep our plantations for 10 to 12 years, in general.”



Furthermore, hedges delimit the blackcurrant fields. It is part of the environmental commitment from the Ribena growers. Hedges, flowers and wildlife are present everywhere on the farms.

At the end of the tour, Anthony shows us his machinery. Not far from harvesting machines, tractors, sprayers and all the other farming material, some cows have their paddock. “This is Christine’s hobby”, smiles Anthony. Because even though fruits have become an expanding activity in the Western Midlands, Hereford cattle is probably still its most famous export.





## **Whether growers or processors are concerned: the right variety can make a huge difference!**



Lots of blackcurrant varieties exist all over the world. New cultivars are being bred in almost every blackcurrant growing country. It is certainly difficult to make the right choice among over 150 cultivars. The criteria of the fruit growers may be economic (time of flowering and harvesting, yield potential...) or agronomic (resistance to diseases for example).

What is of interest to processors, though, has much more to do with the chemical composition of the fruits: acidity, sugar content, color, taste... Some processors will accept only certain currants to achieve the best result in their products.

This is the case, for example, for the production of Ribena in the UK. Or on the other side of the Channel, French liqueur manufacturers like Vedrenne or others, will not accept more than four or five very specific varieties. What matters to them is the taste of their products. And not to forget: the insurance to have the best quality from contracted growers.

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# **International Blackcurrant Conference 2018: save the date**

**From 6th to 9th June 2018, Angers will welcome blackcurrant professionals from all over the world for the next International Blackcurrant Conference. The French call the Loire Valley the “Valley of kings” - or “the Garden of France”. The name already sounds promising: it must be the right place for the organization of the IBA Conference 2018!**

***Follow information and registrations for the conference on***

***[www.blackcurrant-iba.com/event](http://www.blackcurrant-iba.com/event)***

**the Location**



The Loire Valley region (Pays de la Loire) is situated in Western France. It is 300 km southwest of Paris and 90 km east of Nantes (the closest airports). Tourism flourishes here: UNESCO has recognized it as a World Heritage Site in 2000. In its capital Angers - (pronounce it *ã.ʒe*, with a typically French nasal "an") - an impressive castle stands guard over opulent timber houses and Gothic grandeur.

Interestingly, Angers is not only known for its history. It is also a centre for innovation and home to many prominent companies and their research teams. The surrounding countryside hosts the vineyards of the "Aubance", the "Anjou" and "Saumur". And along the banks of the giant Loire river, châteaux and abbeys pay homage to the history of the region.



From Orléans to Angers, the Kings of France frequented the Loire Valley in the Middle Ages. Impressive castles ("châteaux") are all around. This whole region is the most important region of France for horticultural production. Horticulturalists, gardeners and nursery growers produce over 1000 different varieties of plants.

Among apple, pear, peach, cherry and other fruit trees, we can also find berry fields. And among these: blackcurrants - of course!

## The Organization

The French Black-and Redcurrant Association (ANCG) will organize the IBA Conference 2018. It had already been the host of the last French IBA conference in 2010 in Beaune (in Burgundy, Eastern France). As blackcurrants are grown in different regions of France (as you can see from the map beside), it will be interesting to have another view of French blackcurrant growing. The organizing team will not be the same. This time, the blackcurrant growers from the Loire Valley, together with the “IDfel Val de Loire” (an association of all economic players in fruit and vegetable growing in the region), are in the driver’s seat.



## Save the date

**The IBA Conference 2018 will take place from Wednesday 6th to Saturday 9th June.**

On the very first day, there will be technical meetings in the framework of another (national) conference for “small fruits”. This conference is co-organized together with the CTIFL. CTIFL is a French experimentation and innovation center for professionals in fruit and vegetable growing. For attendees who also work with raspberries, strawberries or other berries, this day may be a wonderful occasion to take even more profit of the conference.

Or if you prefer, an exciting visit of the New Holland manufacturing unit in Coex will fill the day. The following three days will look like usual IBA conferences with the IBA Annual General Meeting. There will mainly be presentations from researchers in all kinds of fields: agronomy, health, marketing... Meetings, farm visits and visits of factories shall complete the programme. Finally, don’t miss the blackcurrant product contest - and maybe more...

## **No IBA conference in 2017?**

As announced at the last IBA conference in Ashford, the International Blackcurrant Conferences will take place every second year only. Since 2008 and until 2015, four European countries had also organized smaller conferences. But due to high costs for those who participate, for those who organize, and for the IBA, we have decided to keep only bi-annual events on an international level. There will therefore be no conference in 2017.

But it will make the other conferences even more attractive: more to share, more to learn, and a wonderful time to be with “blackcurrant friends”.

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# **Frost in Europe: a nightmare for blackcurrant growers**

**Terrible night frost in late April 2017 devastates the blackcurrant farmers' hope for a good yield.**



What had looked very promising until mid-April turned into a nightmare for many blackcurrant growers all over Western Europe. The first months of the year had been like every year and weather conditions were good. Two weeks of sunshine and warmth in early April brought the blackcurrants to lovely blooming. The bumblebees did their work like usual, humming had been all around, and the growers were happy with a low level of diseases and pests.

## Change of meteorological conditions in mid-April all over Europe



But around Easter, the situation changed totally: from 25°C in daytime, the temperatures dropped to 10°C. And then - the meteorological forecasts announced night frost! When Michael Bullinger from Germany inspected his Tisel fields just before the frost, the plants were in full blossom. But it was already clear that with temperatures like -8°C announced for the coming night, none of the bushes would bring any currants. His yield 2017 may not be existing - but he has still hope for a few varieties like Ben Alder and Ben Hope, which had not been blossoming yet. And luckily, temperatures are increasing slowly.

## Sad Reports from several growers in different countries

This picture has been taken by Daniel Pröbstle from Günzburg in Bavaria

**(Germany):** a blooming blackcurrant field covered with snow! One can easily understand what



this means for this

year's yield. Other German growers who were less affected still talk about at least 50% loss.

Growers from **France** said that varieties like Blackdown in Burgundy had already finished blossoming, and currants are growing on the bushes. But other varieties had just started blossoming. And quite logically, the further North we go, the more effects the frost has had in the blackcurrant fields. For France, this is already the second year of strongly reduced yields because of night frost in April - unprecedented conditions, which push certain farmers to stop growing blackcurrants.

**Poland** reports similar conditions: from 16th April onward, temperatures were below zero; in some regions even below -6°C. Frost losses are already visible, although it is difficult to estimate them precisely today. In any case, as Poland is the World's biggest blackcurrant producer, the damages will have consequences.

Of course, what can be observed everywhere must be assessed locally: the effects of the frost first depend on the blackcurrant varieties. It can also change from one grower to the other within the same country, and even within the same region.

### **Exceptional conditions?**

As a conclusion, we can already foresee that the 2017 harvest will not be memorable in terms of quantity. And according to what we are already being told from climate specialists, we will have to expect more and more extreme weather events of the same kind. They will certainly impact all of our growers in the near future. Spring frost, drought, no frost in winter (although blackcurrants need it), hail and many more surprises of this kind can destroy plantations and reduce the harvests. Global warming is a vast subject, but it is clear that it effects our ecosystem - and blackcurrants are part of it.

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# IBA Executive meets in Hereford

It had been time to sit around a table and talk: the IBA executive meeting in the United Kingdom on 18th and 19th March allowed us to discuss vital subjects in a small committee and with promising results. Usually, the IBA Exec (president, vice-presidents and General Manager) have regular meetings on skype.



This time though, the list of topics to discuss had become too long. We (IBA vice-

presidents Jens Pedersen from Denmark and Piotr Baryla from Poland, and IBA General Manager Stefanie Sharma from France) therefore decided to drop out our suitcases and accepted IBA president Anthony Snell's invitation to his farm in England. During the 3-hours drive from London to the Western part of England already allowed us to share experiences in the car. Upon our arrival, Anthony welcomed us very warmly at Windmill Hill in (less warm) Harewood End.



## **Saturday, 18th March: Meeting in the office of Windmill Hill**

As a start, discussions about vital subjects within the International Blackcurrant Association kept us busy for several hours. We talked about the 2017 budget, the strategy for the coming year, new and ongoing projects like the IBA quality mark or the IBA smoothie contest, the next conference in France, as well as the organization of a trip to Poland. This trip will take place in June this year. It aims at learning more about the biggest blackcurrant producing country of the world.

Luckily, blackcurrant based refreshments and products (made with the fruits from Anthony's farm!) helped us to stay concentrated. Thomas, one of Anthony's employees from Poland, assured translations from Polish to English and vice versa when it came to complicated matters.

## **Evening dinner in Hereford with Jo Hilditch**



Later on the day, Jo Hilditch, head of the British Blackcurrant Foundation, joined us in Hereford for a most delightful dinner. She is a blackcurrant grower in Herefordshire herself, and brought along her “British Cassis”. But not only this: we have had interesting discussions about Brexit, local specialities and many more...

## **Sunday 19th March: the British blackcurrant growing situation - meeting with LRS-agronomist Harriet Roberts**





On Sunday morning, we continued our discussions until Harriet Roberts, agronomic advisor from LRS (Lucozade Ribena Suntory) arrived. She explained us how the British growers work with LRS. 90% of the British blackcurrant production goes into the production of Ribena, a blackcurrant-based soft drink of English origin. The collaboration between Ribena and the British growers is very close: Ribena imposes precise quality standards and quantities. The growers under contract with Ribena therefore benefit from support of the LRS agronomist. Furthermore, they are sure to sell a certain amount of blackcurrants at an approximate price level fixed for seven years and adjusted every year. Harriet Roberts visits every farmer under contract with Ribena five times a year.





## **Windmill Hill : an amazing farm to visit**

Anthony then drove us through his property. We could see there that, apart from growing blackcurrants for Ribena, Windmill Hill produces other fruits. First of all, 20% of Anthony's blackcurrants are grown organically (variety Ben Tirran). He sells them for yogurts, cordials and juices, or as IQF, through his own website.

But there are also strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and chuckleberries.





We have seen amazing facilities! Read more about it in our article about Windmill Hill.



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# **IBA quality mark: added value for good blackcurrant products**

How can a company give value to its blackcurrant product? Many juices, nutraceuticals, confectionary, sweets and other products with blackcurrants are in the market worldwide. But nothing allows the customers to identify which are good, better, or just ordinary. The International Blackcurrant Association has therefore decided to create an IBA quality mark.

**What will the IBA quality mark include?**

Everything has not yet been decided – but a few things are certain:



First of all, the IBA label will have its own look and shall be recognizable very easily by the customers. A designer is already working on it, and we are confident that we will have something good to show very soon. The label will, of course, mention that the blackcurrant is the best berry for life! And it will guarantee some important points to the customer in terms of traceability, amount of blackcurrants used to make the given product and several more.

We are working hard on the project, together with IBA members who already agreed on putting the brand new label on their products! We hope to be able to present the products and the label at our next conference.

### **Added value of the IBA quality mark for processors, marketers and Growers**



example of a quality mark

What we plan to do is not just another label to stick on any product. There will be a strict quality charter, to which not any product can easily apply. We will check the products, the applicants, and allow the use of the label only for a certain time – and within limits. We really desire to distinguish outstanding products from

ordinary ones. Because our objective is to give the customers a hint of what is good for them.

Many existing brands may apply for it, as we all know how important it is to show your difference in the market. We hope that it will help to develop the sales of the best blackcurrant products. Our label shall improve the image of such products. And it shall reward the companies who are engaged in making the best for their customers. And finally, it shall reward the growers who work hard to grow the best blackcurrants for the best products.

**So: follow-up with the project. we are sure you will all like it!**

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## **Blackcurrant product contests: next will be in June 2018!**

Do you think that your blackcurrant products are outstanding compared to those of other companies? Or do you produce original things with blackcurrants? Something you think that nobody has ever tried to make? Something so good that you simply want to share it with everyone? Participate in the blackcurrant contest 2018 then!

**Flashback: contest 2016**



Blackcurrant  
product  
competition -  
overall winner:  
blackcurrant  
gummy bears  
from  
Cassismanufakt  
ur

Those of you who have been present at the last IBA conference in Ashford certainly remember the first blackcurrant product contest. During this event, several companies presented a huge number of well-known blackcurrant products, like jams or juices.

But we have also seen (and you probably tasted) some very interesting innovative products with blackcurrants - like blackcurrant gummy bears. If you haven't been there, or if you want to recall good memories, check out what had happened! You will also find the brand names of all those who participated in the contest.

## **Blackcurrant contest 2018**

The blackcurrant contest 2018 is already on the way. The French organizing team for the conference in Angers has put the same kind of contest on its agenda. We are all looking forward to even more products, even more participants, and even more innovation! We do not have any details yet - there is more than a year left to go before the event. Still, the outlining will be similar.



## Blackcurrant product competition 2016

If your products fit in one of the 3 following categories:

1. Cassis, cordials, juices
2. Food products (Preserves, fruit leathers, pies, confectionary)
3. Functional food (nutraceutical products which offer proven health benefits, made from all elements of the blackcurrant fruit, backed by hard science)

Keep your eyes and ears open! We will call for participants in the contest and start preparing nice rewards for the winners very soon.



## Blackcurrant product competition - the winners 2016

A panel of professionals will judge the products according to taste, packaging and several other criteria, and reward the best product of each category.

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# The blackcurrant smoothie contest of the Austria Juice and IBA New Product Development Unit

The Austria Juice & IBA New Product Development Unit has started its work. Its members have exchanged via Skype, phone calls and emails over the past months. Now, an exciting project is already under preparation: a blackcurrant smoothie contest!

## 1st Blackcurrant Smoothie Contest in Nuits-Saint-Georges (France)



On 7th July, one stage of the Tour de France 2017 will lead from Troyes to Nuits-Saint-Georges. Until then, there is nothing very spectacular. But if you consider that Nuits-Saint-Georges is in the heart of Burgundy, the region which

1. grows huge amounts of blackcurrants in France
2. where several companies produce the famous 'crème de cassis'
3. where you will find the Cassissium, a unique interpretation center about blackcurrants,

and finally that

4. between 30 and 40 thousand spectators are expected for each stage of the Tour de France,

there is no doubt: something with blackcurrants MUST happen there!



We have therefore decided to organize a smoothie contest. Because smoothies are healthy, in fashion everywhere, perfect for a hot summer day. And perfect also for sportspeople. Many of you know already that blackcurrants have wonderful effects on sportspeople's performance. Blackcurrants reduce muscle fatigue, increase fat burning and improve

recovery after exercise. These are already enough reasons to combine Tour de France and blackcurrants.

Several food bloggers will prepare their version of the best blackcurrant smoothie over the whole day. The people in Nuits-Saint-Georges at that moment will be served a few sips of each and they will vote for their favorite smoothie. Finally, a panel of food professionals will separately vote for the best smoothie.

This event is a wonderful occasion to make bloggers and other food professionals, as well as end consumers, get aware of what they can do with blackcurrants.

A nice opportunity for our superfruit to get publicity among a huge number of people.



**Follow us:** Best of Cassis, #bestofcassis

**More contests to come?**



## Austria Juice New Product Development Unit

This all sounds nice? No, not only nice, but great! We are therefore thinking of repeating the same event in more cities, other countries, with different participants. And why not with other ingredients and for other preparations? We can duplicate the same kind of contest anywhere, at any time, and for any product.

We can well imagine a contest for the best blackcurrant pastry. Or another one for the best blackcurrant ice cream. If not a blackcurrant smoothie contest, then a blackcurrant dish contest. We will see how the first event turns out, and then think greater!

Learn more about the IBA & Austria Juice New Product Development Unit.

### **Other blackcurrant market opportunities - lots of ideas and potential for our favorite berry**

This idea of a food contest has come up while we were thinking of new blackcurrant products for the world's market. Current food trends (snacking, healthy food, less sugar, organic, ready-to-use...) encourage us to think that blackcurrants have a wonderful potential here. Too many end products do not exist yet, or only in a limited number, or in a few countries. Given the growing awareness of people about its health benefits, the market for existing products could increase through exports.

New end products could also be launched: like **ready-made smoothies** with

blackcurrants. Or **blackcurrant chocolate**, or **energy drinks**, or **energy bars**? They do exist with cranberries and blackberries – why not with blackcurrants? Yet, we all know that the health benefit of blackcurrants is much higher than these fruits! Moreover, the price of blackcurrants is much lower, as they are easier to grow and harvest. Who will launch this kind of products? When will we have **blackcurrant granita** or **blackcurrant coulis** in one of the huge global fast food chains ?



Another concern is: how can people cook with blackcurrants, if they cannot find them in the market? Where are **dried blackcurrants**? Or a **fruit mix** for the preparation of smoothies? Or simply: **frozen blackcurrants** – which are mostly unavailable in many countries.... When will we finally see blackcurrants in several forms (frozen, fresh, dried, **powders**) over the whole year in our supermarkets, so that anyone can buy them at any time?

## **Will we improve the availability of blackcurrants in the future?**

Yes, blackcurrants mainly go into the production of juices. And therefore, the biggest part of the yields ends up as blackcurrant concentrate. We are now launching a blackcurrant smoothie contest, but the smoothies have to be made with concentrate, because nothing much else is available. And even if people like our blackcurrant smoothies, how can they make it themselves – without blackcurrants? They will not find concentrates or purees, no frozen blackcurrants, and not even pure juice (without water and added sugar) – just a few blackcurrants during the 3 weeks of harvesting.



We want to sell more blackcurrants, but we don't offer a sufficient range of products to the end consumer – there is still a lot of work to do! This is a huge challenge for Austria Juice and the NPDU – and hopefully for other research and development units.