

VANCLIEF, Kurt

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### Early pickers

Among early pickers in the Willowlee strawberry patch this season were Carm and Dorothy Cook of Trenton, who report they have been coming to the patch "for six or seven years." And, they said, the berries this year are big and bountiful. Here, they display some of their pickings to Kurt

Vanclief, (right) new owner-operator of the popular pick-your-own patch. Strawberry growers throughout the area report a much-advanced start to the strawberry harvest in the Quinte area this year.

## Kurt gets back to family roots in a county strawberry patch

By Jack Evans  
The Intelligencer

Willowlee doesn't show up on a map in the Quinte area, but it's a place many area residents are familiar with.

And most people tend to equate Willowlee with berries, particularly pick-your-own strawberries. It's an operation the Vanclief family have been running for more than 50 years under that name, and now it is being carried on by a third generation.

Kurt Vanclief is one of the newest and also, at age 20, one of the youngest farmers in the area.

His takeover, in recent months, of the north side of the family property signals a rebirth of a long-standing farming operation after his parents, Lyle and Sharon Vanclief formally closed the operation a few years ago.

For Kurt, it is a chance to do full time what he had always wanted to do every since spend-

ing many years as a boy helping his father. And he's learning a lot of things the hard way.

Being one of the helping hands was plenty enough work a few years ago. Now, he says, as he struggles to cope mainly on his own, "I never realized how many things there were to do," as he was taken by surprise by early ripening of his first new plantings of a bumper strawberry crop.

Kurt and other family members see the renewal of the berry patch as particularly significant. It was how his grandparents started in 1940, buying plants from a dealer near Streetsville, west of Toronto. Replanting with new plants every two or three years, the Willowlee patch drew regular customers year in and year out.

Kurt and his father, Lyle, both agree that if any there was a year to start in farming full time, this is a rare one. Abundant heat units and adequate rainfall have meant early, prolific growth for almost everything. Kurt has

sown corn and soybeans for the commercial market and also is putting in some sweet corn for the garden trade, plus the strawberries. He is also reactivating the family's former hog business, stocking the relatively modern barn complex with weaners to bring to market size.

For Kurt, the past few weeks have often meant 14 to 16-hour days, he says.

He made arrangements to buy the property a couple of years ago and operated it around his summer job last year. This year, putting his college education "on hold" after one year, he's doing full time what he had always wanted to do.

Getting back to the berries, now in the midst of a lush harvest, Kurt recalls that his grandfather never met the grower of the strawberry plants around Streetsville, but only did business over the telephone. His grandmother did the driving every year they needed more to pick up the plants. She also picked up the