

Harvesting the fruits of

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WALKERTON — They're sweet and juicy, red and seedy and picking them is a favourite summer pastime. Strawberry season is in full bloom and it's almost time to pick a fresh batch at Davishill Nursery.

The Davis family of John, Debby and Jeff have started up their own you-pick strawberry patch on their farm, and are almost ready to open it to the public.

The Davis' have lived on their farm in RR 2 Walkerton for the past 15 years, and are now retired dairy farmers. Their 27-year-old son Jeff has owned and operated the Davishill Nursery for the past eight years. Although he enjoyed growing and selling shrubs, trees and 200 kinds of perennials, Jeff said he and his parents wanted to start growing strawberries as well.

"I thought we could use dad's agriculture skills and my horticulture skills to make it work," Jeff explained.

In their retirement, 57-year-old John and Debby, 52, said they entertained the thought of a strawberry patch.

"We felt there was an opportunity because a lot of other patches have closed," added Debby. "We're retired dairy farmers, and we thought we've got time to devote to it."

The idea came to them last summer, and the Davis' began clearing five acres of farmland for the berry patch. They used a tractor with a planting device on it to plant 83 rows of 40,000 strawberry plants.

"I spent a lot of last summer hoeing weeds," explained John.

their labour

"It was very hot and very dry," Debby said.

Fertilizer was spread on the patch in early October, and the family chopped up bails of straw and spread the straw around the strawberry plants for the winter.

"It protects the plants . . . it helps control weeds," John pointed out.

By spring, all of the straw had to be removed from the berry patch, with all three family members using pitch forks for manual removal.

Their work paid off, as the plants

made it through the winter and have already started producing vibrant red strawberries. But the amount of manual labour was a big surprise to Jeff.

"It's a lot more intense than we thought it would be."

The Davis family estimates it will be about two weeks before their patch will be open, and the public is encouraged to watch for a sign on their property.

John said he's pleased with the strawberries he's seeing sprouting on the plants.

"I would say (it's) a decent, average crop," he said. "We should be able to get two years out of this patch, and we'll plant more if this works well."

"I'm sure it's going to work out very well," added Debby.

FACTS ABOUT THE PATCH

- The strawberry patch spans five acres on the Davis' farm
- 83 rows of strawberry plants were can be picked
- The Davis' planted 40,000 strawberry plants for the patch

