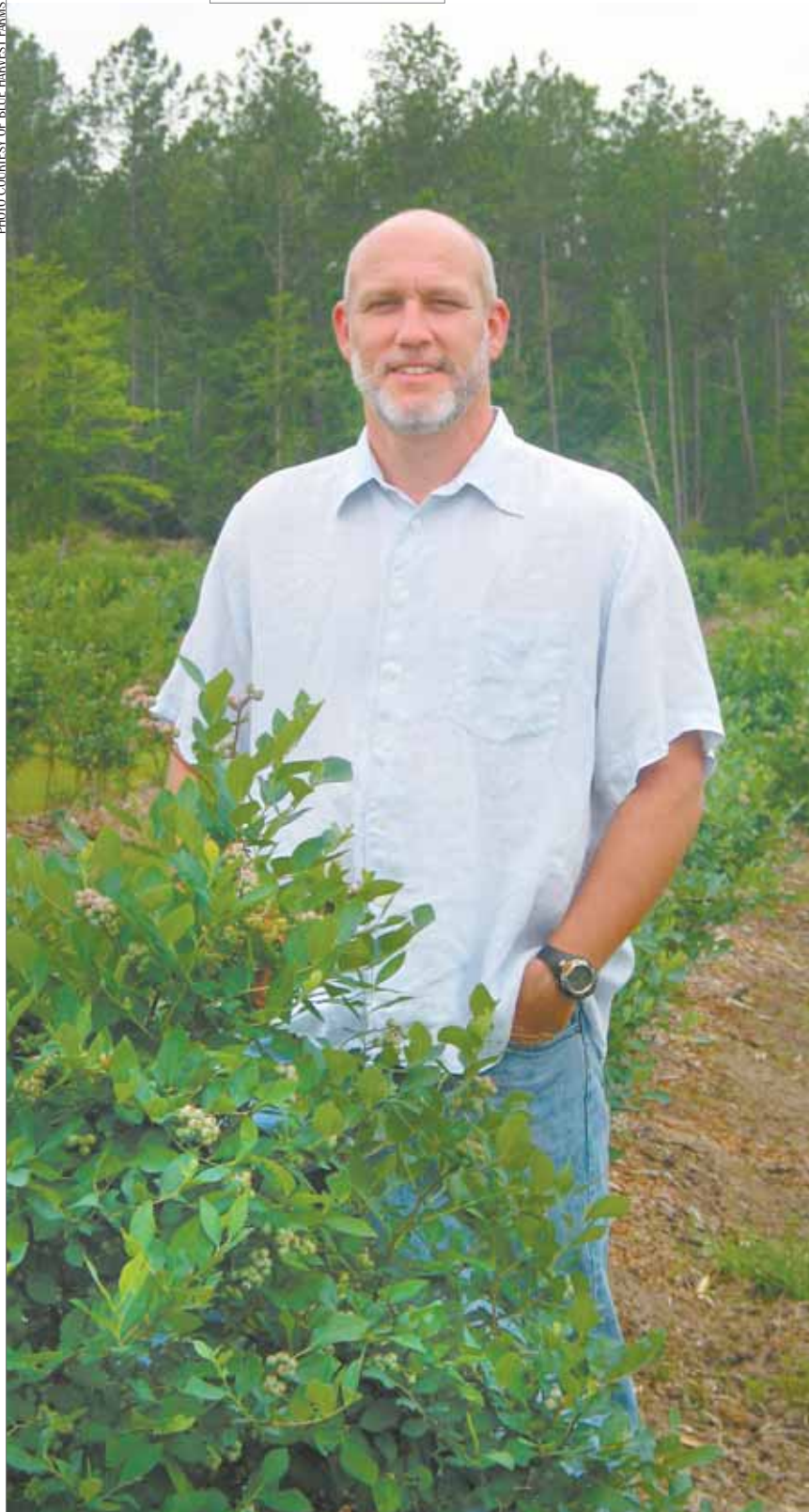


Last word

with **Chris Pinto**, owner of Blue Harvest Farms pick-your-own blueberry farm

By Craig Guillot
Contributing Writer

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE HARVEST FARMS



Age: 39

Family: wife, Rachael; sons, Joshua, 17, and Wyatt, 7; and daughter, Sophie, 3

Education: bachelor's degree in accounting, Louisiana State University

Hometown: New Orleans

Fast Fact: At one time Pinto wanted to grow pecans until he did some research and learned that "I would probably be 80 years old before those trees matured."

Having spent part of his college years in Georgia around pecan orchards, Chris Pinto always told himself he wanted to live on a farm someday. His dream became a reality in 2005 when he moved to St. Tammany Parish, bought a 6-acre plot of land in Covington and started planting blueberries. As a pick-your-own farm, Blue Harvest Farms claims some of the largest and sweetest blueberries in the South.

Pinto is president of the Holy Cross School Alumni Association and the owner and president of Restored Developments, a residential green building company focused on energy-efficient, smart homebuilding. Before coming to St. Tammany, he served as president of Cypress Pharmaceutical and Hawthorn Pharmaceuticals in Jackson, Miss.

When are blueberries harvested?

Their fruiting time starts in June in Louisiana and extends to August. The bushes will flower in February, the fruit starts popping out in April and the fruit ripens, depending on the variety, from June to August.

Did you have any kind of farming experience before this?

None. In the past two years, I really devoted a lot of time and effort to getting this field up and running. I managed the entire process and was involved in everything. I was on a tractor setting out rows, getting stuff planted. It's not my full-time job, though, but it's more than just a 1-acre blueberry patch in the backyard. It's like a hobby on steroids.

Do you eat blueberries yourself and if so, do you get tired of them?

Absolutely. In fact, I still have berries we picked last season that we froze and I eat it in cereal every morning. During the height of the season, I might get a little tired of them when I am constantly putting them in my mouth and tasting them to see what rows are sweet and ready to pull.

Are there any tricks to picking blueberries?

The only secret is that you have to pick a blue blueberry. They are green right now but as the season goes on, they will go from green to red and they'll go from red to a blue with a grayish tint. If the berry is not that blue, it's not going to be as sweet as you are expecting. There is nothing special about it. The blueberries are in clusters and it is very easy to pick them. You just get a bucket, put a liner bag inside of it and just start filling it up. A gallon is about 5 pounds of blueberries.

Why are we seeing more pick-your-own farms?

I think with the way we are starting to question our crops, we as a society have become more conscious about what it is we are feeding our kids and ourselves. We're more conscious of the herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals we are exposed to. I have a lot of people who call to see if we have anything other than blueberries or vegetables or fruits. People want an organic source, and it's just fun for the family to spend a day picking their own fruits. •