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Barley harvested at Shelter Point Farms is distilled to make single malt whiskey and vodka that sells internationally

# Hooked on a feeling

FARMING ON VANCOUVER ISLAND COMES WITH ITS SHARE OF CHALLENGES. BUT THE LANDSCAPE PATRICK EVANS FARMS IS THE LAND HE LOVES. HE'S DOING HIS PART TO ENSURE IT'S CONSERVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

By Julielee Stitt

Patrick Evans could trade it all in for the predictability that comes with a cubicle and 9 to 5 job. Or better yet, retire.

They're options the Vancouver Island farmer's flirted with once or twice, as he's struggled to get a crop off the field or wrestled with bureaucracy. For Evans, though, a life without farming isn't something he can envision.

Along with his family, Evans owns a 380-acre (153-hectare) farm on the eastern shore of the B.C. island, between the cities of Courtenay and Campbell River. Here, he crops raspberries and barley.

"For me, it's more about the natural environment. Making a profit is a must. We can't get by without it. But when you're having a bad day and you wander around the farm, well you just get this feeling," he says.

It's that hard-to-define sentiment Evans' experiences that keeps him on the farm and led him to partner with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC).

In 2011, Evans donated a portion of his property, valued at \$1 million, to DUC and the Comox Regional Valley District. Today the area, known as Bear Creek Nature Park, attracts wildlife, waterfowl, salmon and people.

While the area wasn't conducive to farming, Evans recognized its ecological value and the importance of safeguarding the land. "The choice was to sell [the land] to a gentleman farmer or maintain the community," says Evans. "Probably, in the short-term, the money would have been way better. But when I look back in 20 years, it will be a no-brainer," he adds.

On the acres he farms, Evans has a conservation covenant (easement) with DUC. As part of this agreement, Evans is financially compensated for limiting the number of covered buildings (like greenhouses) on his farm. The covenant also places a cap on the acres used for berry production. Berries, unlike grasses, grains, vegetables and corn provide limited habitat for waterfowl.



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Patrick Evans of Shelter Point Farms made a \$1 million land donation to Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Comox Regional Valley District. Just like the whiskey he makes at his on-farm distillery, conservation takes time and investment, says Evans.

“Before making a decision, Patrick always asks: what will it mean to wildlife, to agriculture and what does it mean to the community?” says Dan Buffett, DUC’s manager of provincial operations in B.C. “Those are always good questions to have. And questions that DUC considers when designing and customizing projects with our partners,” adds Buffett.

The arrangement works for Evans. When he’s faced with everyday challenges on the farm that range from general repairs and upkeep to ensuring his business is profitable, he can still take time out to wander his acreage and get reacquainted with that feeling that keeps him on farm.

Life might be easier if he were to sell the land and trade it in for a desktop and parking spot. “But that’s not what farming’s about,” he says. “It’s hard and it’s long-term. And so is conservation.