

## **“A safe environment for workers and customers makes for good business”**

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(637 words)*

“A safe environment for workers and customers makes for good business,” says Ian Simmons. “We care about the safety of our employees and the public coming through our doors. I want everyone going away feeling good about coming here and doing business. If there is something we can improve on – then let’s do it!”

That is the business philosophy at Kool Breeze Farms of Summerside, PEI, which was established in 1990 by brothers Douglas and Ian Simmons. The enterprise today now consists of a garden centre with 14 greenhouses of bedding plants, 11,000 layer hens, a Fall Scarecrow Contest and snow removal in the winter.

The garden centre started out as a hobby in 1986 and has now grown into a full time operation with four full-time and four part-time year-round employees as well as 10 seasonal workers. The greenhouses have almost 36,000 square feet under plastic and grow over a thousand varieties of annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. Kool Breeze Farms retails directly to consumers and landscapers and also wholesales to several PEI outlets. In the summer, the garden centre location also supports a fresh produce market sourced from local producers.

Kool Breeze Farms currently has a verbal safety program and they are diligent in training and actively practice safety in all they do.

Simmons believes their safety success is because they keep things simple. Only a few experienced people are allowed to drive the tractors. Wagons are always blocked before unhooking. Machines and vehicles receive regularly scheduled maintenance. And all work places are kept clean and tidy. Personal protective equipment is provided where needed. Emergency numbers are posted next to each phone, and there are first aid kits and fire extinguishers in every vehicle and tractor.

“Many of our staff have been with us for years, so our team members know what we expect of them and also we know how skilled and conscientious our workers are,” says Ian Simmons. “However, we start each new growing season with a staff meeting to catch up on changes, then use instruction along the way and a lot of common sense. I always tell everyone there is no such thing as a silly question, so if you are not sure – ask.”

Health and safety issues tend to be addressed as they arise. For example, several workers were getting sore feet when standing for long periods so rubber mats were installed in key work areas. The business also has paid to ensure all year-round staff and half the seasonal workers complete first aid courses and four are also trained in CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation).

Although chemical use is rare on Kool Breeze Farms, to ensure proper handling, Douglas and Ian have their pesticide applicators’ licence for the operation. Additionally, nine staff also have their vendor’s pesticide licence.

When asked about the investment he makes in safety Ian says “ I believe at the end of the day that safety is a minor cost when you think about it. The cost of not being safe would be far greater.

*“Plan • Farm • Safety”* is the theme of the 2010 Canadian Agricultural Safety campaign. Each aspect of the theme will be promoted over the next three years. This year the campaign will promote "Plan" with safety walkabouts and planning for safety. In the second year, the focus will be on "Farm" including implementation, documentation and training. In the third year, emphasis will be on "Safety" including assessment, improvement and further development of safety systems.

The year-long “Plan” campaign will be launched with Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW), from March 14 to 20. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture and Canadian Agricultural Safety Association deliver CASW in partnership with Farm Credit Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

For more information on how to “*Plan • Farm • Safety*” go to [www.planfarmsafety.ca](http://www.planfarmsafety.ca) .

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\*\*\* Photos are available at [www.casa-acsa.ca](http://www.casa-acsa.ca) to accompany this article.