

## Berries Could Provide Economic Bonus For Ohio Farmers

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Ohio farmers with small- and medium-sized farms could bring in some extra income by planting berries, said Dick Funt, Ohio State University Extension small fruits specialist.

Recent health studies that show berries can reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease have increased their demand.

"We can sell all the berries that are grown in Ohio if we can get them picked," Funt said. "In fact, I think we could produce twice as many berries as what we're producing today before supply would reach demand."

There are many new types of berries available with better flavor, shipping qualities and other improvements that make

marketing easier. And, research at Ohio State shows that mechanical harvesting that reduces labor time can be done at a reasonable cost for larger growers. So now is a good time to look into berry production, Funt said.

A new publication from Ohio State University Extension called "Brambles—Production, Management and Marketing," Bulletin 782, contains this information and more. The bulletin explains the various cultural management techniques necessary for a successful raspberry, blackberry or other type of bramble enterprise, Funt said.

The bulletin is a complete source of information in an easy-to-read text with many full-color pictures that will help

growers make important preproduction decisions, he said. Production economics, refrigeration costs and rates of return for different marketing systems are also discussed.

Most raspberry and blackberry growers are looking for a 12 percent to 14 percent rate of return on their investment over the 12-year productive life of their berry plants, and with current berry prices that should be attainable, depending on yield, Funt said.

In Ohio, raspberries and blackberries average about 1,500 to 1,700 pounds per acres per year. Profitable pick-your-own prices for most growers are from \$1.20 to \$1.70 per pound depending on when the berries ripen. Hand-harvested berries require \$1 to \$1.10 more than the pick-your-own selling price to gain an equal profit.

"If people are interested in growing raspberries or blackberries, before they enter the business they need to gather some information and make some critical biological, technological and economic decisions," Funt said. "What type of cultivar will you raise, what equipment might be reasonable and what rate of return would you like on your investment? The bulletin provides information that helps people answer those questions."

A grower typically has to invest \$5,000 to \$6,000 per acre for a 2-acre to 5-acre operation

to get started.

"As a perennial fruit crop, you'll put a lot of money up front in the first year or two and get considerable returns in years three through 12," he said. "Growers need to determine if they can afford that initial investment and decide if they want to take the risk."

Planting, pruning and picking berries also requires a lot of labor. Proper management of a berry patch often takes about 350 hours of labor a year, Funt said.

"Berries have to fit into the current farm operation," he said. "One member of the family may be fully committed, but is the rest of the family willing to give up the summer vacation season and put time into harvesting berries?"

Small or medium-sized farms with time available for proper management are best suited to growing berries. These farms usually have smaller fields, so they spend less time harvesting other crops, Funt said. Most berries in Ohio are currently grown east of Interstate 71 and along Lake Erie.

Other things to consider before starting a berry operation are possible sources of hired labor for harvesting, refrigeration after harvest and potential markets where berries can be sold quickly. Berries are perishable and holding them more than a day or two after picking

becomes a problem, Funt said.

The creation of "Brambles Production, Management and Marketing" is part of the Ohio Berry Strategic Plan developed by the Ohio Farm Bureau, Ohio Fruit Growers Society, the Ohio State University's department of horticulture and crop science, the Ohio State University Centers at Piketon and the Ohio Department of Agriculture. The plan calls for an organized expansion of the Ohio berry industry to meet the demands of the fresh market and opportunities arising in new markets, Funt said.

The brambles bulletin was written by members of Ohio State University Extension's Ohio Small Fruit Team and was supported by Ohio growers through various research grants from the Ohio Small Fruit and Vegetable Research Foundation and the Ohio Department of Agriculture. The facts in the publication are based on years of research done in Ohio, he said.

The bulletin costs \$6.50 and can be purchased at county offices of Ohio State University Extension. Growers outside of Ohio can contact Ohio State University Extension Media Distribution by phone, at (614) 292-1607, or e-mail Pubs@postoffice.ag.ohio-state.edu to receive the bulletin by mail. Ordering by mail will cost \$10 \$6.50 plus \$3.50 for shipping and handling.

## Crop Insurance Reform Moves To Conference Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The National Farmers Union (NFU) applauded the recent Senate passage of a bill to make needed reforms to the federal crop insurance program.

The measure, authored by Sens. Robert Kerrey, D-Neb., and Pat Roberts, R-Kan., lowers premiums for farmers and ranchers and provides additional incentives to purchase higher levels of coverage.

The bill also improves coverage for producers facing multiple years of disasters, addresses quality adjustment and yield history issues and includes several pilot programs, including giving producers a choice between a direct cash payment for

practicing risk management or subsidized crop insurance and permitting livestock coverage.

"We are very pleased to see the Senate has finally passed crop insurance reform," said NFU President Leland Swenson. "While crop insurance cannot replace an effective farm safety net, it is a must for producers who have to routinely cope with production losses beyond their control. We hope a conference committee will be appointed quickly in order to finish work on this important legislation."

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a similar bill last year. Differences between the two bills will now be reconciled by a House-Senate conference committee.

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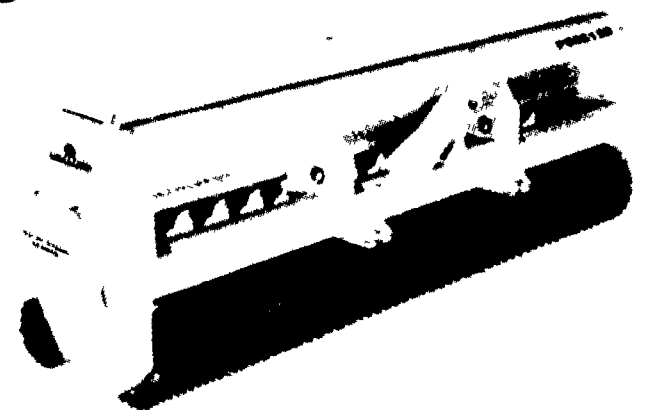
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