

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



OUR VISION

An agricultural business environment that promotes a vibrant wild blueberry community and fosters profitability, innovation, and the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of Maine's wild blueberry farms and food processors across all scales of production

OUR MISSION

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine is dedicated to conserving and promoting the prosperity and welfare of this State and of the wild blueberry industry of this State by fostering research and extension programs, by supporting the development of promotional opportunities, and other activities related to the wild blueberry industry.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Diversify allocations to ensure programs support the depth and breadth of the industry

Do not, either intentionally or unintentionally do harm to any part of the industry



TABLE OF CONTENTS



A Note from the Executive Director	1
Who We Are	2
Year End Financials	4
Strategic Priorities	5
Strategic Planning Process	9
Grower Listening Sessions	10
Industry Communications	15
FOSTERING RESEARCH	
Advisory Committee	16
PROMOTION	
Fresh Pack and Value-Added Committee	18
Wild Blueberry Weekend	19
Investment in WBANA-US	20
School Nutrition Program	24
PUBLIC POLICY	
State	25
Federal	26
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES	
Team Wild Harvesting Project	27
Web-based Marketing Grant	28
Commission Staff	29
Competitive Advantage Statement	30

NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Maine Wild Blueberry Producers,

Thank you for investing your time in the business of wild blueberries. Whether you are a 7th generation grower spending weekends keeping a family tradition alive, a first-generation grower forging an innovative new path to farm viability, a company that supplies global markets, or a tribal member with a rich wild blueberry tradition dating back thousands of years – thank you for continuing to honor and build upon our rich traditions.

Our industry is changing, and with change comes great opportunity. The Governor’s Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program of 2022 injected almost \$20 million dollars into farming infrastructure, and more than a few of those funds are helping wild blueberry businesses adapt, grow, and compete. Companies are re-envisioning the wild blueberry market and their role in it, and through innovation, collaboration, and investment they pursue stability and growth. The University of Maine’s Blueberry Hill Farm will be the subject of a \$3 million dollar investment from Congress to help reshape the farm into a facility that catalyzes innovation, profitability, and economic, social, and environmental sustainability across all scales of production. The Commission itself is embarking on a \$1 million dollar project, thanks to a \$500,000 grant from the Maine Technology Institute, to reduce harvesting waste and foster an engineering team that will employ technology to tackle industry challenges.

One of the highpoints of the year was listening to your ideas and challenges during three grower listening sessions we hosted in Hope, Machias, and remotely. You told us that you require access to a reliable and affordable workforce, and that suffering the impacts of drought in two of the last three years is two years too many. You expressed concerns about profitability and scaling up. Your input is invaluable and is the foundation upon which the Commission built its priorities for the next two years.

Finding and catalyzing solutions to these problems is our highest priority. I hope that you take the time to read this report to learn of our efforts, challenges, and successes as we seek to build solutions.

Sincerely,



Eric Venturini
Executive Director
Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine
Eric.Venturini@maine.edu
Cell: (207) 478-7612
Office: (207) 581-3496

WHO WE ARE

COMMISSIONERS (2022)

David Bell, Chair

Cherryfield Foods, Inc.
Cherryfield, ME

Simeon Allen, Vice Chair

WR Allen, Inc.
Orland, ME

Marie Emerson

Wescogus Wild Blueberries
Addison, ME

Darin Hammond

Jasper Wyman & Son
Milbridge, ME

Lisa Hanscom

Welch Farm
Roque Bluffs, ME

Nicolas Lindholm

Blue Hill Berry Company
Penobscot, ME

William (Bill) Mallar

Pumpkin Ridge Farm
Marshfield, ME

Todd Merrill

Merrill Blueberry Farms
Ellsworth, ME

Darren Paul

Passamaquoddy Wild Blueberry Co.
Columbia Falls, ME

Empty Seat

Processor-Representative

FRESH PACK AND VALUE ADDED COMMITTEE (2022)

Courtney Hammond, Chair

Lynch Hill Farms.
Harrington, ME

Greg Bridges, Vice Chair

Bridges Wild Blueberry Company, Inc.
Calais, ME

Marie Emerson

Wescogus Wild Blueberries
Addison, ME

Lisa Hanscom

Welch Farm
Roque Bluffs, ME

Ron Howard

Brodus Blueberries
Hope, ME

Jacob Lennon

Sennett's Wild Blueberries
Albion, ME

Lynn Thurston

Blue Sky Produce
Scarborough, ME

Interested in serving on the Commission or one of our Committees? Contact us to ask how!
wbcm@maine.edu
(207)581-1475

WHO WE ARE

Cont'd...



ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS (2022)

Bruce Hall, Chair

Jasper Wyman & Son
Milbridge, ME

Tim Tabbutt

Tabbutt and Daughters Blueberries
Jonesboro, ME

Ron Howard, Vice Chair

Brodie Blueberries
Hope, ME

Paul Sweetland

Coastal Blueberry Service
Union, ME

Denise Alexander

Alexander's Wild Maine Blueberries
Greenfield, ME

Katy Yeatts

Cherryfield Foods, Inc.
Cherryfield, ME

JD Newell

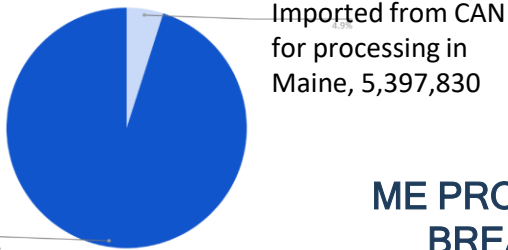
Passamaquoddy Wild Blueberry Co.
Columbia Falls, ME



Interested in serving
on the Commission or
one of our
Committees? Contact
us to ask how!
wbcm@maine.edu
(207)581-1475

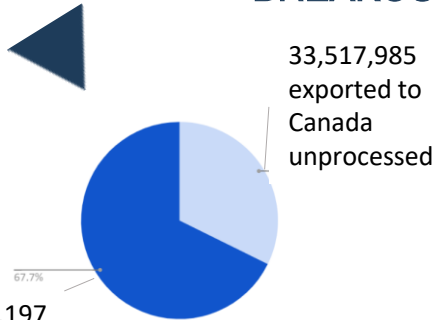
YEAR END FINANCIALS

2021 WILD BLUEBERRY PRODUCTION (LB)



Grown in Maine, 103,793,182

ME PRODUCTION BREAKOUT



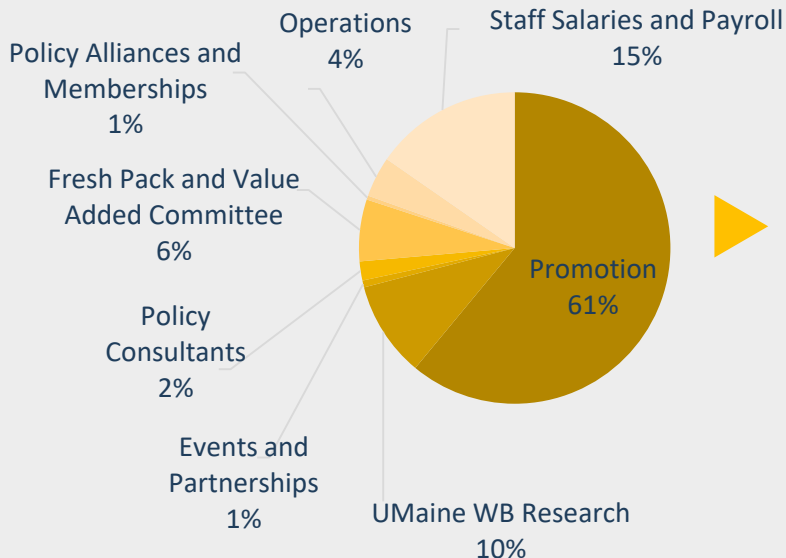
70,875,197 processed in Maine

1.5 cents/lb tax allocation for use in 2022 budget

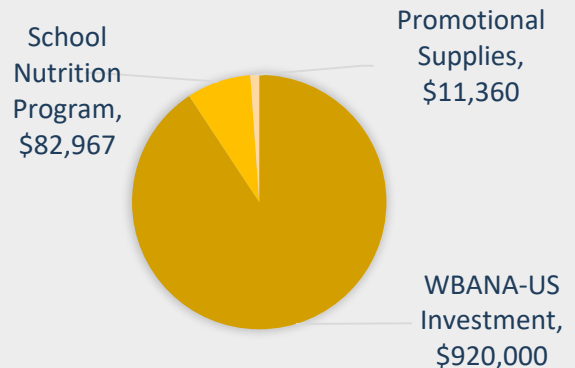
2021 Blueberry Tax Income **\$1,703,870**



2022 COMMISSION EXPENSES



PROMOTIONAL BREAKOUT



2021/2022 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



The Commission focused on accomplishing 4 overarching strategic priorities for the 2-year period ending in December of 2022. **HOW DID WE DO?**

1. IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF MAINE WILD BLUEBERRY PRODUCTION

- Created the first ever [Wild Blueberry Weekend](#) (WBW) in 2021 and increased WBW-driven consumer impressions 28x during the second year. Secured \$100k in grant funding to support this initiative. Some participating farms sold more than \$10,000 in product and attracted > 1,000 on-farm visitors.
- Secured \$500,000 in grant funding to support a \$1 million project to improve harvesting efficiency, reduce shrink, and gain labor efficiencies, across scales. The project launches in 2023.
- Advocated for State farm grant programs like the Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program, which invested \$20M through competitive grants to Maine farms for infrastructure and capital expenses. Seventeen percent of these grants were awarded to 10 projects (out of 60 total awards) that involved Maine wild blueberries.
- Through investments in WBANA-US, helped to drive consumer demand for wild blueberries by educating consumers about the health benefits of wild blueberry consumption, taste, and the Maine wild blueberry story.

2. CONSERVE AND PRESERVE MAINE WILD BLUEBERRY LAND AND ITS HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

- An industry member initiated, and we supported the designation of Downeast as National Heritage Area ([NHA](#)). This is a Federal designation that was passed in 2022 by Congress, and will funnel hundreds of thousands of dollars to Washington and Hancock Counties for economic development annually.
- We educated dozens of town offices across major growing regions about Maine's Current Use Taxation laws, and initiated ongoing coordination with governmental and non-governmental agricultural groups to raise awareness of these tax reduction benefits amongst farmers and municipalities.

2021/2022 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Cont'd...



3. SUPPORT UNIVERSITY WILD BLUEBERRY RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

- The [Advisory Committee](#) funded 6 wild blueberry research and Extension projects in 2022, expending \$156,815 to help address climate change, improve integrated pest management, and better understand wild bees in wild blueberries. By leveraging these funds, the Committee's research priorities, and industry and Commission support, University of Maine researchers accessed \$3.3 million in external funding for wild blueberry research and Extension in 2022 and may receive up to \$8 million additionally for projects that would start in 2023.
- Through ongoing concerted efforts (Advisory Committee, Commission, industry members) have steadily grown number of researchers at the University of Maine engaged in wild blueberry.
- Through membership on the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance ([SCFBA](#)) Steering Committee, helped to create Federal (Farm Bill) recommendations that would increase the availability of wild blueberry research and Extension funding.
- The Advisory Committee initiated a new process to solicit proposals, with the expectation that we will reach a broader audience to help further increase the capacity for wild blueberry research.
- Initiated increased coordination between University of Maine Extension and the State to improve [food safety guidance](#) and maintain our industry's excellent food safety record.
- Led industry support of the University of Maine's congressional request of almost \$3 million dollars to overhaul Blueberry Hill Farm in Jonesboro, helping to revitalize and increase it's capacity to serve producers' needs. We owe great thanks to Maine's Senators and Representatives for spearheading this request in Washington and getting it across the finish line.

4. IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (TO MAINE'S WILD BLUEBERRY FARMS AND BUSINESSES)

- Sought Federal solutions to the agricultural labor crisis, although ultimately a farm workforce bill introduced in December 2022 failed to satisfy producer needs and was not passed.
- Coordinated with State agencies and national coalitions to improve existing, and create new opportunities for sustainable water source development and irrigation funding support. The Governor's budget in 2023 includes \$2 million for farmer drought relief.
- Strived to represent your voices in the State Legislature, tracking 31 bills. Successfully helped defeat 3 bills and helped pass 5 that included producer grants and drought relief programs.
- Through our membership on the [SCFBA](#) Steering Committee, helped to create Federal (Farm Bill) recommendations to address critical needs of wild blueberry producers including R&D funding for mechanization and automation, increased availability of sustainable irrigation and water source grant and cost-share funds, improvements to crop insurance program, and much more.

2023 / 2023 PRIORITIES

The Commission focused on accomplishing 7 short-term priorities in 2022. We still have work to do!

2022 SHORT TERM PRIORITIES

DID WE DELIVER?

1. Help address labor challenges

Instrumental in helping to defeat State labor bills. Advocated to improve the H-2A Visa program in the Farm Workforce Modernization Act and the Affordable and Secure Food Act; Supported the development of labor-saving R&D and USDA program rec's as part of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance ([SCFBA](#)) Steering Committee and working groups. Efforts include numerous in-person and remote meetings with our Congressional Delegation and their staff.

2. Advocate for State and federal policies, taxes, and regulations that support our industry

Tracked 31 bills and advocated for industry positions in the 130th Maine State Legislature; Engaging with State agencies and our Congressional Delegation to address industry priorities in the next Farm Bill; Initiated increased coordination between food safety authorities to help improve available guidance on wild blueberry food safety practices; Educated municipalities about Current Use Taxation programs; Advocated internationally to harmonize Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs); Engaged the State and state commissions on concerns about possible challenges to sustainable water use rights; Educated 40-50 Maine policymakers about the wild blueberry industry, challenges and opportunities, at the Agricultural Council of Maine's Harvest Tour; Represented the industry and its priorities (esp. climate change adaptation and labor challenges) directly to the US Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack.

3. Invest in promotion and health research to drive demand

Invested \$920k in the [Wild Blueberry Association of North America](#) to highlight the Maine brand, health benefits of wild blueberry consumption, and superior taste to consumers across the nation. Read more (pp. 20-23)

4. Carry out and support regional and targeted promotions

Successfully hosted Wild Blueberry Weekend, creating 100M+ consumer impressions and opportunities for on-farm sales over the weekend that sometimes exceeded \$10k; Provided financial support, materials, and/or apparel to 14 different Maine fairs and events; Surveyed consumers and sampled wild blueberries to motorists at 195 rest stops. Secured a \$100k grant to support the second annual [Wild Blueberry Weekend](#).

5. Continue to improve industry communications

Hosted 3 separate grower listening sessions to gather and compile producer input to inform 2023 and 2024 Commission work and priorities; Released the first ever Wild Blueberry Commission [website](#), which had 949 unique visitors in 2022; Increased Wild Blue newsletter open rates by 15% YoY and gained 54 new contacts in 2022.

2022 PRIORITIES

Cont'd...

The Commission focused on accomplishing 7 short-term priorities in 2022. We still have work to do!

2022 SHORT TERM PRIORITIES

DID WE DELIVER?

6. Help improve economic sustainability to stop the loss of small growers

Educated municipalities about Current Use Taxation programs to increase producers' ability to access tax savings benefits; Created and supported opportunities for capital and infrastructure investment through state grants and new and improved programs in the next Farm Bill; Consistently raising awareness of wild blueberries among other farm service organizations in Maine so that programs can be tailored to the unique needs of this industry; All other activities also support this priority.

7. Support research and innovations that aids climate change adaptation and reduces supply inconsistencies

Led the Innovation Working Group of 2021 to identify innovation needs in the industry, and successfully secured a half million dollar grant from the Maine Technology Institute to execute on those ideas; Worked through national groups to try and increase the availability of climate resilience, drought mitigation and relief dollars; Maintained ongoing engagement with Maine NRCS to highlight the need for sustainable water source development and irrigation funding for farmers; Supported the creation of LD 1998, a farmers' drought relief fund created through State policy; Advisory Committee funded more than \$78,344 worth of climate change related projects that supported researchers as they secured more than \$250k in external research and Extension climate change funding in 2022 and developed proposals to try and secure more than \$2.5 million in climate change funding in 2023.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Improving Industry Communications

ODD YEARS



Feb./Mar.

Print previous year's **ANNUAL REPORT** and make available to producers.

June

In public WBC meeting, **ASSESS PROGRESS** towards priorities and **REFINE** strategies as needed

Nov. – Dec.

In public WBC meeting, set next year's **PRIORITIES**. Develop next year's plan of work and budget to **BUILD UPON SUCCESS** and **CORRECT SHORTCOMINGS**.

EVEN YEARS



Feb./Mar.

Print previous year's **ANNUAL REPORT** and make available to producers.

June

In public WBC meeting, **ASSESS PROGRESS** towards priorities and **REFINE** strategies as needed

July

In public WBC meeting, carry out region-by-region **GROWER LISTENING SESSIONS** across Maine.



REPORT findings to Commission

Nov.

ASSESS PROGRESS towards priorities. Consider grower listening session input as foundation of two-year priorities. **STRATEGIC PLANNING** meeting to draft 2-year priorities.

Dec.

REFINE AND APPROVE strategic priorities and plan of work and budget that supports them.

Do you want to help us develop priorities? Do you want to **HAVE A SAY** in how your tax dollars are spent? **ATTEND** our meetings! **SUBSCRIBE** to our emailed newsletter, **WILD BLUE**, to be kept abreast of upcoming meetings and industry happenings! Email wbcm@maine.edu.

GROWER LISTENING SESSIONS

Improving Industry Communications

The Commission hosted 3 events in 2022 to hear directly from producers as part of our 2-year strategic process. The input received was used to develop our priorities and work to best support growers in 2023 and 2024.

3 Sessions Held

June 14th in
Hope, ME.
Hosted by
Ron Howard
at Brodis
Blueberries

September
13th Session
via Zoom

September
14th Session
at the
University of
Maine,
Machias

Who Participated?

35

industry
members

1

Congressional
staffer

8

Commissioners

4

Commission
staff

Wild blueberry producers
submitted 27 surveys

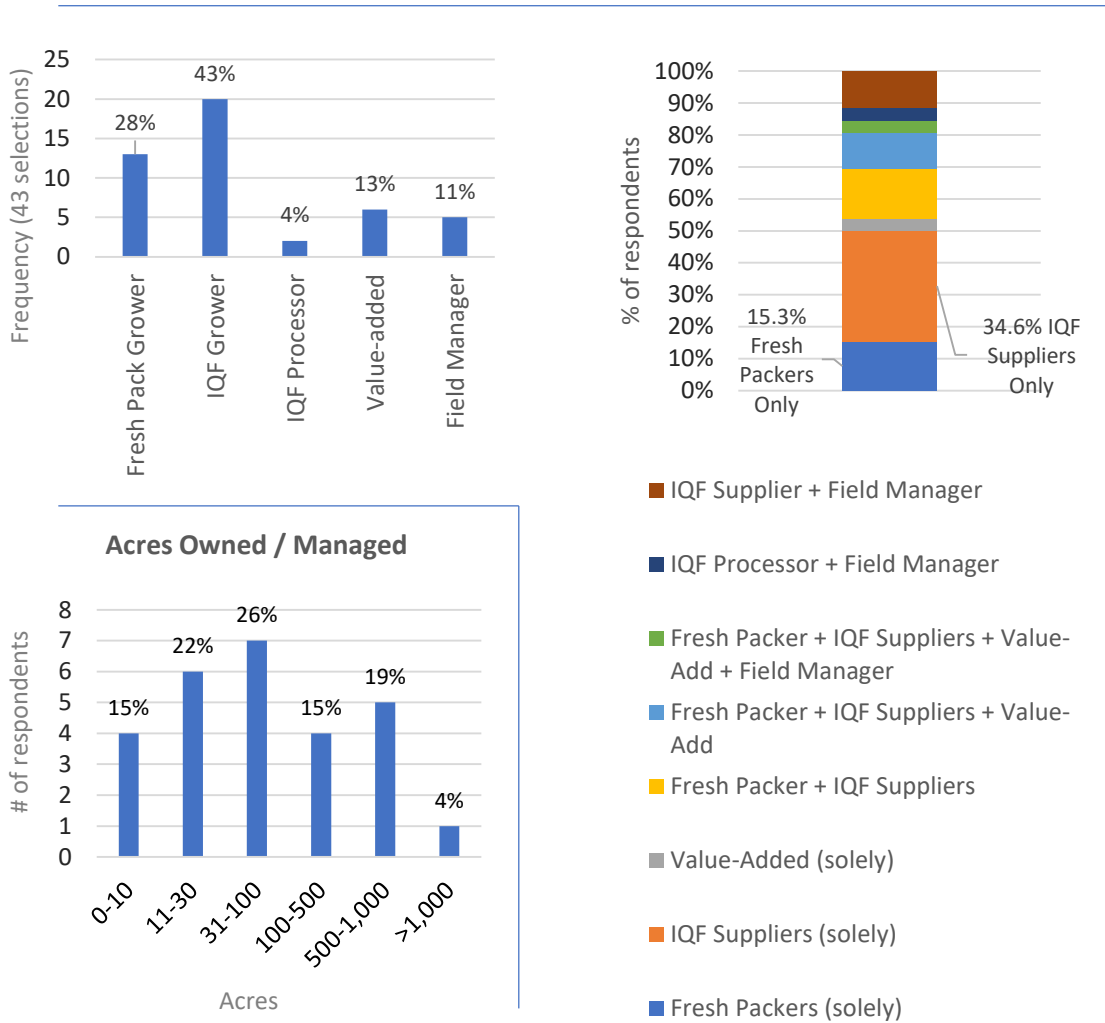
29 producers also responded to 6 live poll
questions during the listening sessions

GROWER LISTENING SESSIONS

Demographics of Survey Respondents

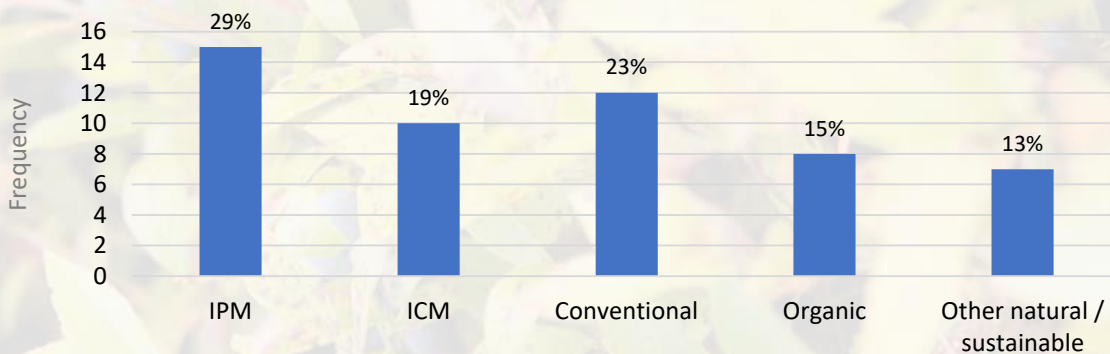


Business Types



- 27 Producers submitted a written survey
- 43% only supply IQF processors
- 21% fresh pack AND supply IQF processors
- 15% only fresh pack
- 46% involved in multiple aspects of the industry
- Managed and/or owned a wide range of acreages
- 71% used IPM, ICM, or conventional management
- 28% used Organic or other natural/sustainable management

Management



GROWER LISTENING SESSIONS

What's Important to Producers?



What Research Topics are Most Important to Participating Producers?

1. Crop Management (Score = 100)
2. Climate Change (Score = 93)
3. Pollination Efficiency (Score = 85)
4. Crop Protectants (Score = 78)
5. Organics (Score = 62)
6. Fruit Quality (Score = 49)
7. Food Safety (Score = 31)
8. Other (Score = 2, a single producer wrote, "mulch")



You said these topics are **MOST** important



You said these topics are **LEAST** important

**Attending in person Extension events scored as the most preferred way to stay informed of research followed by fact sheets, Zoom trainings, and finally the Annual Wild Blueberry Extension Research Report.*

Which Promotional Activities are Most Impactful to You?

1. Investment in WBANA-US (Score = 100)
2. Wild Blueberry Weekend (Score = 82)
3. School Nutrition Program (Score = 77)
4. Support of Maine fairs and events (Score = 63)
5. Sampling wild blueberries on I-95 (Score = 36)



You said these topics are **MOST** important



You said these topics are **LEAST** important

Don't think your opinion is represented? Participate in this process next year! Attend our meetings! Tell us what you think!

GROWER LISTENING SESSIONS

What's Important to Producers?

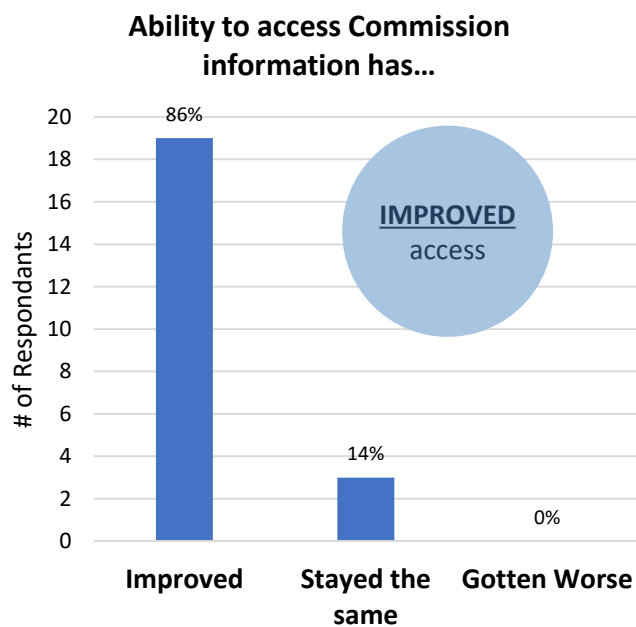
We asked you to rank the importance of federal policy priority topics. You said...

1. Address Labor Challenges (Score = 100)
2. Land Use Rights and Crop Protectants (Score = 87.5)
3. Optimize Business Environment (Score = 79.3)
4. Support Grants for Innovation and Growth (Score = 78.8)
5. Support UMaine research and Extension (Score = 76.9)
6. Educate Policymakers about industry (Score = 63.1)
7. Practical food safety regulations (Score = 62.5)
8. Fair and reasonable tax policies (Score = 58.8)
9. Other (1 producer stated, "mulch"; Score = 0.6)

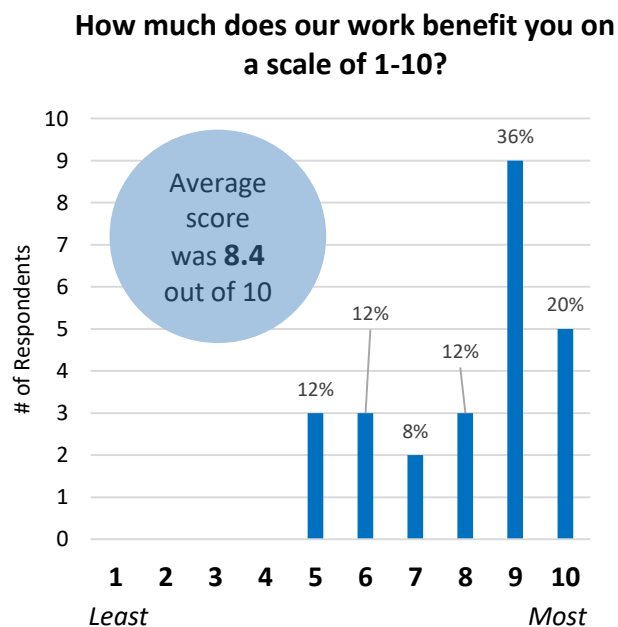
You said these topics are **MOST** important

You said these topics are **LEAST** important

We asked how your ability to access and learn about our work has changed over the last 2 years. You said...



We asked you to rank how much our work benefits you. You said...

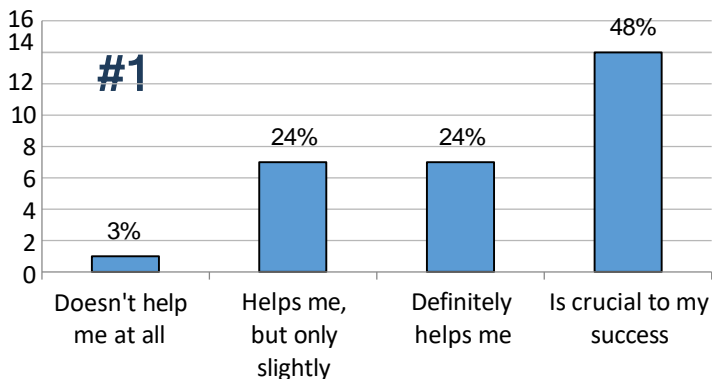


GROWER LISTENING SESSIONS

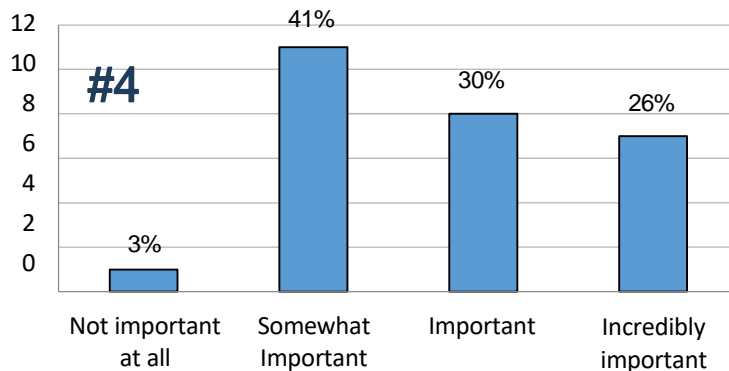
What's Important to Producers?

In order of importance, poll responses collected live during listening session presentation (n=29)

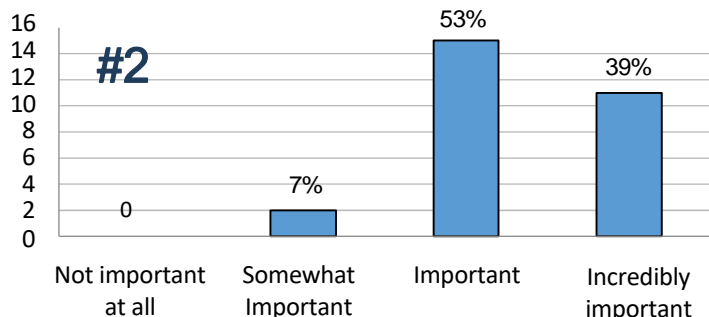
Our investment in the promotion, health research, and foreign market development work of WBANA-US?



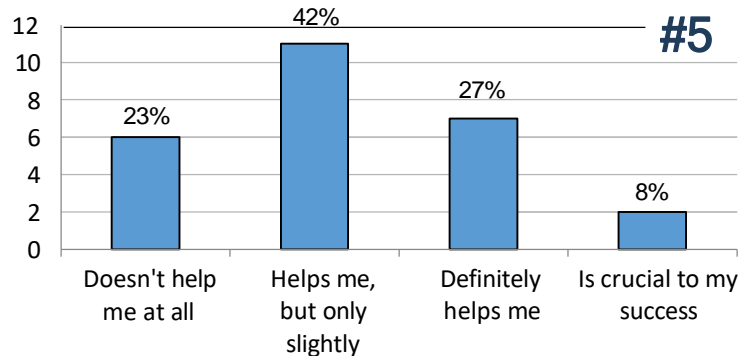
Informing you about the Commission's work (newsletter, website, etc...)?



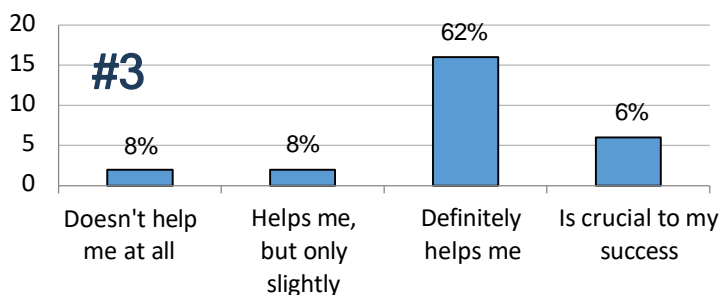
State and Federal policy work?



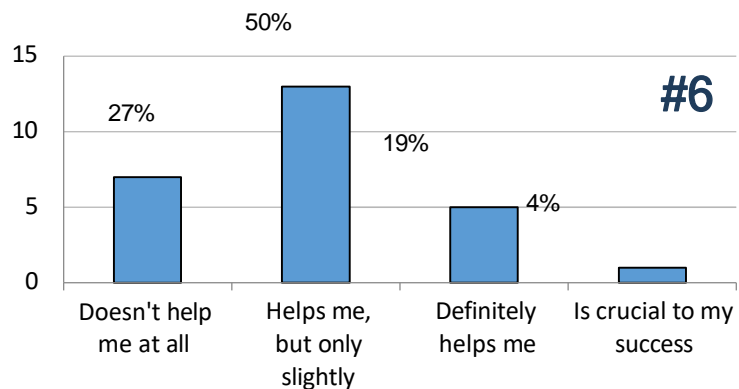
Wild Blueberry Weekend to you?



Our work to support and foster University of Maine's wild blueberry research and Extension programs?



Our School Nutrition Program?





WILD BLUE newsletter

- Now in it's 3rd year
- Continued growth in contacts (6% YoY)
- 60% email open rate (15% increase YoY)
- Click rate 9% higher than industry average
- 2,536 FEWER sends, yet improved responses!

NEWSLETTER ENGAGEMENT VS. INDUSTRY AVERAGE IN 2022



Have you Visited Our Website?

2022 STATS

- 949 unique visitors
- 1,295 site sessions
- 96% of visitors are from US, 2% from Canada

SUBSCRIBE to our emailed newsletter, **WILD BLUE**, to be kept abreast of upcoming meetings and industry happenings! Email wbcm@maine.edu.



FOSTERING RESEARCH

Funding the Advisory Committee to the University of Maine



INVESTED
\$156,815

Awarded
\$156,815 in
2022 to
University of
Maine
researchers

TO:

AND:

researchers
LEVERAGED
industry dollars to
help generate
\$3,440,699 in
total Maine wild
blueberry project
funding in 2022

- Test mitigation strategies for drought using biochar-compost and mulch
- Test and refine the use of drone deployed thermal sensors to evaluate water stress
- Test the effectiveness of herbicide stacking in contrast to certain broad spectrum herbicides
- Evaluate fungicides for their efficacy in managing leaf-spot diseases (a major mechanism of plant stress during drought)
- Improve management efficacy and forecasting of mummy berry
- Study the dynamics of wild blueberry under various precipitation scenarios
- Increase ability to predict plant development stages by improving University of Maine Extension's Phenology Tracker
- Host 7 field days (incl. Blueberry Hill Farm Field Day) and 1 conference with total a attendance across all wild blueberry Extension events in 2022 of 485 people.





INCREASED
UMaine wild
blueberry
research capacity

University of Maine hired an Agricultural Engineer, Dr. Sumon Datta, in May of 2022. Dr. Datta is already embarking on wild blueberry research projects that include harvesting efficiency and irrigation.

The Advisory Committee instituted a new process to solicit research proposals from a broader suite of UMaine faculty and staff in 2022, which has already generated new interest and a novel research proposal.

The Advisory Committee deliberated and released, early in 2022, an entirely new set of industry [research priorities](https://www.wildblueberrycommissionofmaine.org) to guide and focus University of Maine wild blueberry research on critical needs and measurable outcomes. These priorities are published on the Commission's website:
<https://www.wildblueberrycommissionofmaine.org>

More FOCUSED
industry research
priorities

Funding
supported
these
**CONCRETE
RECOMM-
ENDATIONS**

Whole field mulching - Also supported through NRCS funding.

Herbicide stacking – Replace broad spectrum products with more targeted pre and post emergent applications

Foliar samples – Take foliar samples in prune and crop years to more precisely determine fertilizer needs

Store fresh berries at 34F – This is optimal temp for max. fresh pack quality and quality is highest in the first 5 days of storage.

Earlier SWD trapping - Start trapping for spotted wing drosophila (SWD) sooner

Stock hives at recommended rates – Poor pollination found in fields low hive densities

Biocontrol wasps are here – SWD biocontrol are in Maine; University is continuing releases.

Lime sulfur for Exobasidium – Apply before bud break.

Mummy berry disease reports – supported with ongoing maintenance of weather stations.

Fungicide trials – Promising results in 2022. 2023 trial results may confirm recommendations for mummy berry and leafspots.

PROMOTION

Fresh Pack and Value-Added Committee



The Fresh Pack and Value-Added Committee is a volunteer group of 7 wild blueberry fresh packers focused on identifying and improving opportunities for the fresh pack sector. Through their work, they seek to promote the entire Maine wild blueberry brand.

2022 Activities

- Wild Blueberry Weekend (next page)
- Fresh Wild Blueberry Sampling Program

Gave away
over 12,400
samples of
fresh wild
blueberries in
2022



Educated visitors
about health, taste,
and the Maine wild
blueberry story

Helped drive traffic
(4%) to Wild
Blueberry Weekend.
83% of I-95 rest stop
visitors had not heard
about Wild Blueberry
Weekend.



“Last year we had 3.5 million impressions and this year we had a 103 million for Wild Blueberry Weekend. This is a significant uptick in our media impact and dramatically increases the committee’s return on investment.”

*Courtney Hammond
Committee Chair*



Interested in serving on
this committee? Contact
us to ask how!
wbcm@maine.edu
(207) 581-1475

PROMOTION

Wild Blueberry Weekend



2022 marked the second annual Wild Blueberry Weekend, a statewide agritourism event coordinated through the Commission’s **Fresh Pack and Value-Added Committee**. The event provides the public with WILD on-farm experiences, farms with opportunities for sales and new customers, and consumers with a long-term connection to Maine wild blueberries.



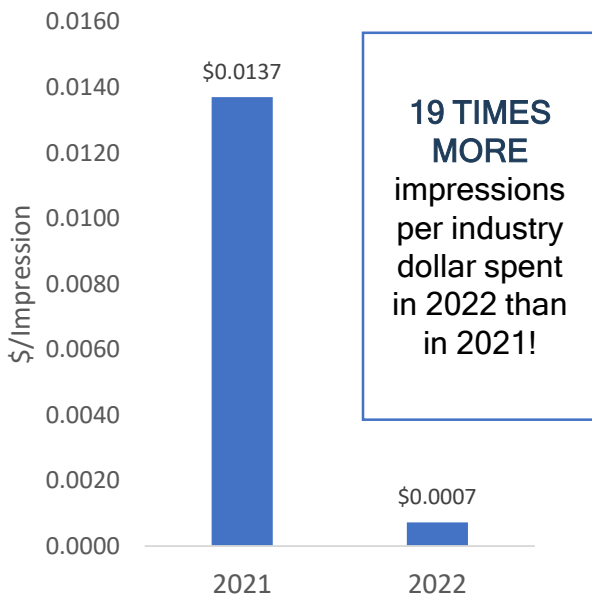
Invested \$72,645 in blueberry tax dollars

+ =

Additional \$27,535 in State grant funding

- **103+ Million** (earned media impressions)
- **50k** (social media impressions)
- **\$36,887** in on-farm sales
- **\$0.0007** spent / impression

Dollars per Impression 2021 and 2022



Secured \$100,000 Specialty Crop Block Grant to support WBW '22 and '23!

“Wonderful way to end my Maine vacation, and I brought 10 lbs of berries home to NJ!”

- Farm Visitor

Contact us to participate in WBW 2023 today!

wildblueberryweekend.com

PROMOTION

Investment in WBANA-US

wildblueberries.com



The Commission annually invests in the Wild Blueberry Association of North America–US (WBANA-US) to fund promotion and health research. In 2022 the Commission invested \$920,000 in WBANA-US.

\$598,493
INVESTED
directly for
PROMOTION
in 2022

5.6
BILLION
USA
impressions
(Jan. – Oct.)

=

Cost per thousand (CPM) of **0.09 cents**

5.6% INCREASE in website traffic

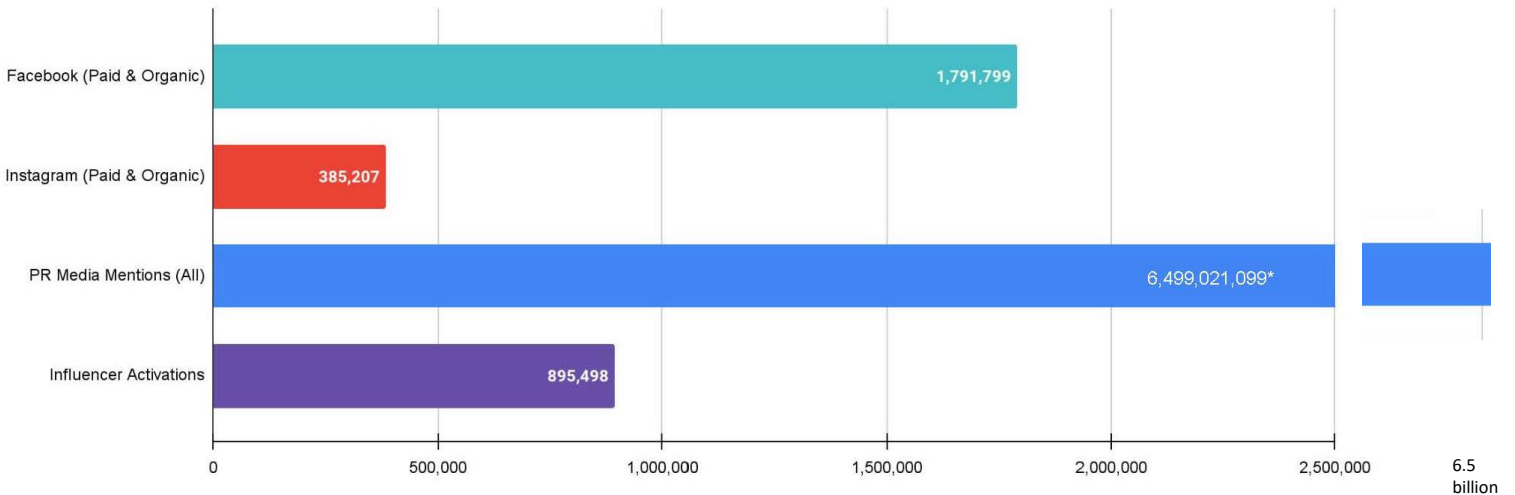
66% INCREASE in brain health traffic

453% INCREASE in brain health impressions

13.7% INCREASE in organic traffic to website

An impression is when a consumer sees content about Maine wild blueberries. Some then visit the website, purchase product, and all are exposed to the Maine wild blueberry story. Includes ALL impressions like earned media (newspapers, radio, etc...), website, social, and influencers. Not all impressions are attributable to this investment. Many attributed to the work of independent wild blueberry businesses.

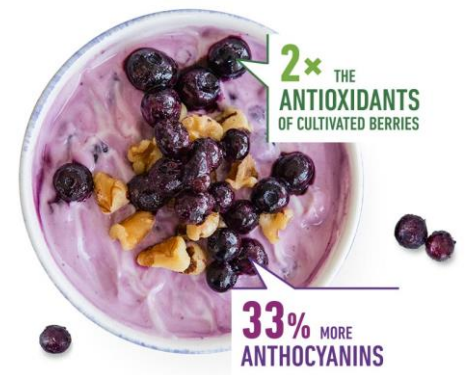
Total Impressions by Platform



NOTE: The blue bar captures ALL media mentions. The entirety of the bar is not shown due to the scale.

PROMOTION

Investment in WBANA-US



DRIVING DEMAND

Frozen wild retail \$ sales **UP 11%**

Up 11% in 2022 and we've seen 89% growth in retail frozen wild sales since 2017

GAINING MARKET share at cultivated's expense

Wild share of retail frozen blueberry subcategory grew from 23.4% to 33.6% since 2017 while cultivated share fell from 74.3% to 67.7%.

Source: AC Nielsen Frozen Fruit 52 weeks ending 06/04/2022, courtesy of Wymans.



HEALTH & NUTRITION

Anthocyanin: Wild Blueberries' Mighty Antioxidant Star

Wild Blueberries are powerful with high levels of manganese, vitamin K, and fiber. Wild Blueberries also have one of the highest levels... [READ MORE](#)

Eat This, Not That!

HEALTHY EATING Expert-Recommended

The #1 Best Snack to Keep Your Brain Sharp, Say Dietitians

These two superfoods make a powerful brain-boosting combo.

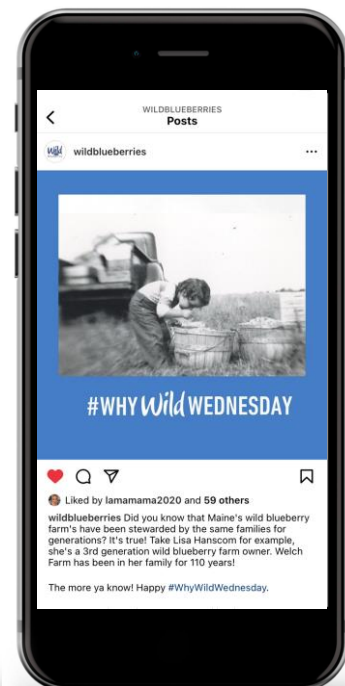
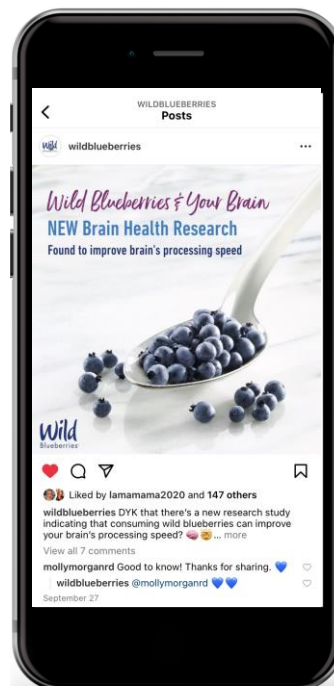
By Rebecca Strong / Published on May 31, 2022 | 9:46 AM

The benefits of blueberries for your brain

Kitty Broihier, RD, the creator of the Eating Habits Lab and nutrition advisor for the Wild Blueberry Association of North America, says wild blueberries, in particular, may help improve memory and executive function. According to Broihier, wild blueberries contain 33% more anthocyanins, a specific type of antioxidant, than regular cultivated blueberries.

"Studies have indicated benefits in verbal performance, memory discrimination, and a trend toward reduced risk of cognitive decline in subjects who ate blueberries," she explains.

A 2019 review in *Advances in Nutrition* found that eating more blueberries was associated with slower rates of cognitive decline in older adults.



HEALTH RESEARCH

Investment in WBANA-US



HEALTH RESEARCH

The goal of the Health Research Committee as outlined by industry representatives is to support and leverage research on the health benefits of Wild Blueberries to drive market demand.

BOOST BRAIN HEALTH IN KIDS



Research found significant positive effects on memory, decision-making, response times, concentration and mood when children consumed a wild blueberry beverage before testing

SLOW BRAIN AGING

A large population study demonstrated that higher intake of anthocyanins is associated with a slower age-related decline in cognitive performance.



IMPROVE MEMORY IN OLDER ADULTS

Studies indicate daily wild blueberry supplementation for elderly adults experiencing cognitive impairment can enhance neural response in certain areas of the brain.



GET MORE OUT OF EXERCISE



Research suggests regular exercise leads to better brain health. Wild blueberries support enhanced fat burning and viral protection when combined with exercise.

REDUCE INFLAMMATION

Daily consumption of wild blueberries may decrease inflammation implicated in chronic diseases, which can impact cognitive health.



Learn more at www.wildblueberries.com

Interested in becoming a member of WBANA-US? Serving on the board or a committee? Call 581-1862 to learn more!



HEALTH RESEARCH, cont'd

The Health Research Committee continued its efforts in 2022 to fund many quality projects in priority areas (brain/cognition, healthy aging, cardiovascular, and metabolic health). Pandemic impacts on work at the university level resulted in some delays and projects taking longer than planned—although at no additional cost to WBANA-US.

OUR
INVESTMENT
IN HEALTH
RESEARCH:



RESULTED IN the PUBLICATION OF 2 PEER-
REVIEWED SCIENTIFIC STUDIES IN 2022

#1

Dr. Carol Cheatham of the University of North Carolina published a study indicating that **WILD BLUEBERRY CONSUMPTION IMPROVES COGNITIVE PROCESSING SPEED**. Press releases were widely picked up by international news outlets including the [Daily Mail](#) and [verywell health](#).

#2

Dr. Colin Kay of North Carolina State University published a study implicating that **WILD BLUEBERRIES MAY HELP AID DIETARY INTERVENTIONS TO MANAGE GASTROINTESTINAL HEALTH**.

2022 Publications From:

Awarded 2022 Funding to:

2023 Outlook Includes:

3
ADDITIONAL
PROJECTS are
in process

2 NEW wild
blueberry
health
researchers

- Publication of a large clinical study
- completion of 3 additional studies
- 9 active projects so far in 2023

PROMOTION

School Nutrition Program

Converting the next generation to the taste of **WILD** and creating opportunities to supply Maine wild blueberries to schools through the USDA since 2017.



\$82,967
invested

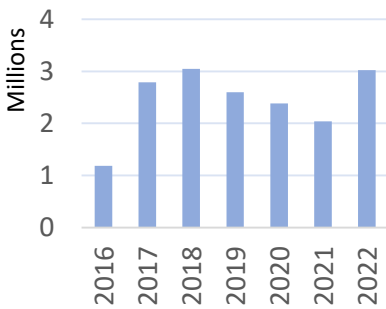
\$6.1M in
sales

ROI =
(Return on Investment)

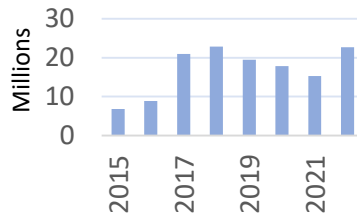
\$73.57 in sales for every \$1 spent in 2022



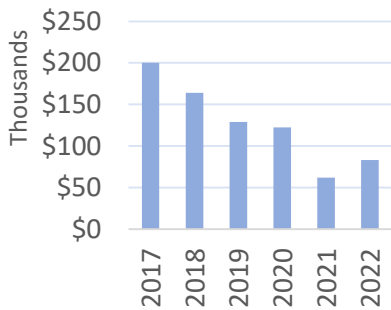
POUNDS SOLD



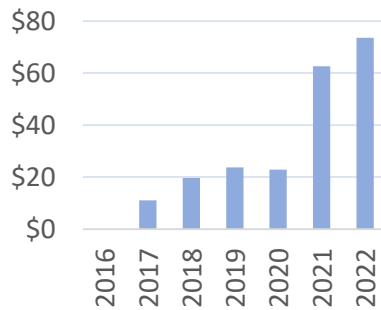
SERVINGS DISTRIBUTED TO US SCHOOL CHILDREN



BUDGET



ROI (\$/\$)



PUBLIC POLICY

State

Striving to represent the voices of Maine's wild blueberry farms and businesses in State policy

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

Tracked 31 bills

Opposed 4 bills (1 passed, 3 died)

Supported 10 bills (5 passed, 5 died)

Our advocacy and coalition building was key to securing funding for Agricultural Development Grants that can help you improve your business ([LD 219](#)), defeating a pesticide sales and use database bill that would have increased your paperwork burden and likely required those records to be posted online ([LD 2021](#)), and creating a grant program for sustainable water source development and irrigation projects ([LD 1998](#)).

Selected Engagements and Outcomes:

An Act To Collect Pesticide Sales and Use Records for the Purpose of Providing Information to the Public ([LD 2021](#))
- **DIED**

An Act To Require the Registration of Adjuvants in the State and To Regulate the Distribution of Pesticides with Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances ([LD 2019](#))
- **PASSED**

An Act To Provide Critical Communications for Family Farms, Businesses and Residences by Strategic Public Investment in High-speed Internet and Broadband Infrastructure ([LD 80](#)) - **DIED**

An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group ([LD 174](#)) - **PASSED**

Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment ([LD 489](#)) - **DIED**

Selected Engagements and Outcomes, cont'd:

An Act to Enhance the Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund by Establishing a Variable Interest Rate for Loans and To Allow Participants in the Maine Farms for the Future Program To Borrow at That Rate ([LD 219](#)) - **PASSED**

An Act to Establish a Fund for Farmers Adversely Affected by Drought Conditions ([LD 1998](#)) - **PASSED**

An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue for Targeted Food Processing Infrastructure ([LD 1475](#)) - **DIED**

Resolve, Establishing the Commission To Study the Role of Water as a Resource in the State of Maine ([LD 1569](#)) - **PASSED**

An Act To Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy ([LD 1565](#)) - **DIED**

Interested in our state policy work? Want to help inform our advocacy? Email Eric.Venturini@maine.edu to get on our grower policy listserv.

PUBLIC POLICY

Federal

We serve on the Steering Committee and several working groups of the [Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance](#) (SCFBA) to ensure that the next Farm Bill works for you.



CORE FARM BILL PRINCIPLES we are supporting through our work in the SCFBA

Healthy Americans: Expanding access and availability to safe, wholesome, healthy and affordable foods, as well as trees, flowers and plants, will encourage lifelong healthy eating habits, mental and physical well-being, and help address national priorities such as obesity, heart disease, and food and nutrition insecurity.

Competitiveness and Sustainability: In recognition of its significance to American agriculture, the American food supply, and the communities it supports across the United States, a proportional share of Farm Bill resources and mandatory spending should be allocated to specialty crop priorities.

Trade and Foreign Competition: Establishing a competitive playing field for American specialty crop producers includes assisting American producers with unfair foreign competition, promoting American specialty crops in foreign markets and eliminating trade barriers that discriminate against American specialty crop exports.

Research and Innovation: A sustained federal investment into research and innovation must be of a meaningful scale to catalyze opportunities for the industry, alleviate existing challenges and propel the U.S. specialty crop industry to a new level of global competitiveness.

Natural Resources and Climate: Recognizing the diverse nature and unique challenges involved in specialty crop production enhances the ability of specialty crop producers to participate fully in all USDA conservation programs as well as any initiatives to address global climate change.

2022 NATIONAL POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

\$3 Million for University of Maine's Blueberry Hill Farm: Led and coordinated industry support for the University of Maine's Congressionally Directed Spending request of Congress, which was ultimately successful in providing \$3M for improvements.

Building support for sustainable water source and irrigation funding: We are charting a path to improved drought resiliency by advocating for better access to sustainable water source and irrigation dollars.

Audience with Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack: Twice in 2022, spoke with the US Sec. of Ag. to find solutions to climate change, irrigation, and labor challenges.



We visited Washington DC in September, bringing your priorities, challenges, and needs

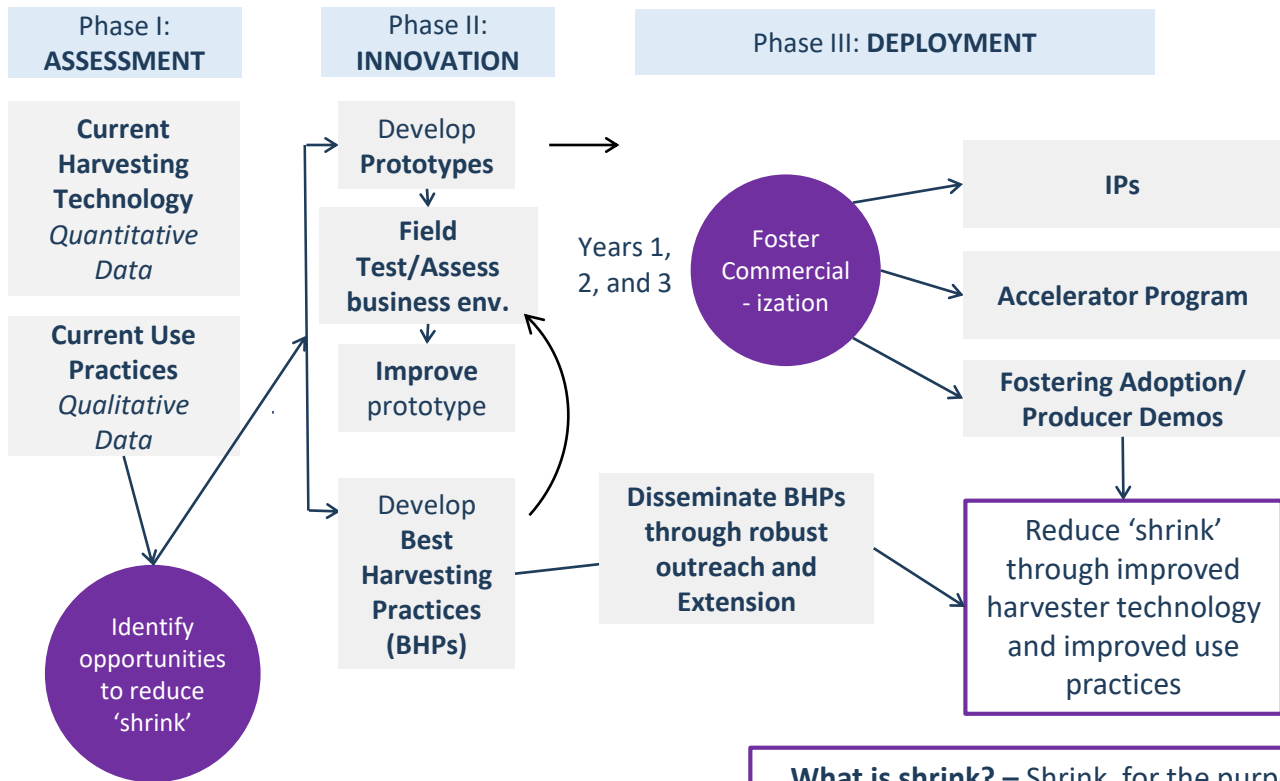
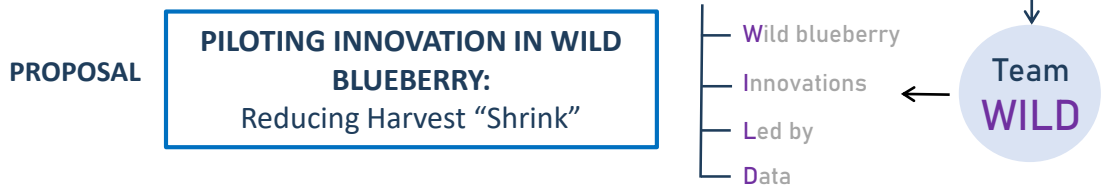
directly to Congress. As part of the [International Fresh Produce Associations' Washington Conference](#), we led a contingent in meetings with our congressional delegation to discuss solutions to labor challenges, irrigation cost support, climate change resiliency, food safety, and nutrition.



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Team WILD Harvesting Project

Last year (2021), our Innovation Working Group identified an innovation need for our industry. In 2022 we secured a grant from the Maine Technology Institute supporting a \$1 million project to address it. The project is led by Team Wild at the University of Maine and guided by a robust industry steering committee.



What is shrink? – Shrink, for the purposes of this work, refers to lost wild blueberry volume and value due to berries left on the ground, damaged during harvesting, or otherwise lost or damaged due to harvesting operations.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Web-based Marketing Grant



In 2020, The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry awarded the Commission a grant to increase web-based market access for wild blueberry producers. The final phase of the project was led by Maine Farm to Institution and culminated in a survey of project participants. Their feedback is described here.

Although some participating producers made connections to institutions and other buyers, the two web-based programs were **NOT A SUSTAINABLE CHOICE** in the long run for producers to sell their product.



Forager had consistent difficulties with buyer recruitment and retention, which Impeded transactions and frustrated sellers.

Local Food Marketplace is better suited to food hubs. It is not a match to our small scale producers without aggregator access

Participants suggested we consider:

Providing **TECHNICAL AND/OR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO BUILD AND HOST OWN WEBSITES**. They suggested this would help increase their visibility to buyers, and could help access new markets.

BETTER LINKAGES TO STATE INSTITUTIONAL BUYERS through, e.g., the Maine Farm and Seafood Directory, Real Maine Directory, Harvest of the Month map, and Local Harvest Website.

Cooperative pilots to **ADDRESS AGGREGATION, PROCESSING, AND DISTRIBUTION CHALLENGES** cited by participants.

INDUSTRY TARGETED PROMOTIONS TO NATURAL FOOD STORES, CO-OPS, AND REGIONAL GROCERS to highlight “Maine wild blueberries” and take market share from, e.g., Canadian, cultivated, and other berry sectors.

Opportunities **TO SUPPORT PRODUCERS’ EFFORTS TO EXPAND PRODUCTION CAPACITY** (processing, freezing, and labor).

Opportunities **IMPROVE FROZEN FOOD DISTRIBUTION INFRASTRUCTURE** in the northeast.

Opportunities **to SAVE FARMERS TIME**, e.g., harvesting and production efficiencies and access to labor.

COMMISSION STAFF



Eric Venturini

Executive Director
Eric.Venturini@maine.edu
Office: (207) 581-3496
Cell: (207) 478-7612



**Jennifer McGinley
Maskala**

Director of Programs
jennifer.maskala@maine.edu
Office: (207) 581-3490



Ginger Hansen

Administrative Specialist
wbcm@maine.edu
(207) 581-1475



Alex Harkness

Student Communications and
Administrative Specialist

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE STATEMENT

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine is a diverse group of wild blueberry growers and processors created by Maine statute. The Commission's work is executed using grower and processor tax dollars and allocated to support the industry by the Commission. One of the Commission's great strengths is the fruit itself. The wild blueberry is a globally unique healthful wild food, indigenous to our region, with a rich cultural history of management and harvest. In a rapidly changing world that poses many obstacles to the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of our farms and businesses, we represent the sole entity with a clear mission to support the future of our industry.



5784 York Complex Suite 52 · Orono, ME 04469 · 207-581-1475 · wbcm@maine.edu
www.wildblueberrycommissionofmaine.org