

WILD
BLUEBERRY
COMMISSION OF
MAINE



ANNUAL REPORT

2024 & 2025





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.

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A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEAR MAINE WILD BLUEBERRY PRODUCERS,

2025 was one of the hardest years Maine wild blueberry growers have ever faced. We estimate the industry lost roughly \$28 million due to excessive rain during pollination, followed by extreme heat and drought during harvest. These swings continue to expose one of the industry's biggest long-term challenges: unstable supply. In bad years, the losses are severe. Over time, that instability weakens our market position.

The path forward is clear: more growers in Maine and Canada need reliable water sources and irrigation to stabilize wild blueberry supply.

But infrastructure takes capital. In 2024, USDA awarded the Commission \$15.5 million for wild blueberry water infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, that award was revoked in June 2025 along with many other climate-related federal awards. Despite that setback, we continue pushing for investment in water and irrigation at both the state and federal levels, and progress is being made. Our advocacy helped realize Maine's Farmer Drought Resiliency Fund, and we are advocating for other solutions in the Farm Bill.

Beyond water, the industry continues to face strong economic pressure. Still, there are growers who remain profitable even in difficult years — across fresh pack, organic, and traditional IQF operations. The common factor is investment. These businesses have secured and used capital to strengthen their operations: diversifying products, improving efficiency, scaling up (or down) wisely, integrating equipment and management, and/or investing in sustainable water sources and irrigation to protect yields when prices are often highest.

The opportunity now is expanding those successes across the industry. That means helping growers access the capital needed to invest in improvements that strengthen long-term profitability. Over the past several years, we have

worked to develop new state funding opportunities, including the Farmer's Drought Resiliency Fund and the Agriculture and Forest Infrastructure Investment Fund. We continue to advocate for strong funding for these and other programs through the Legislature and in partnership with other agricultural groups.

At the federal level, we are working to deliver emergency support. In early 2025, many growers who took the time to apply received payments through USDA's Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program — a program we helped shape and revise so wild blueberry growers could qualify. That program delivered about \$18 million to Maine specialty crop producers. We worked with the USDA and national partners to secure relief for the 2025 crop year through USDA's Assistance for Specialty Crop Farms program and potentially a Supplemental Disaster Relief Program or disaster relief through other Congressional channels.

At the time of writing this in 2026, the Commission delivered \$1.3 million to stand up an emergency industry grant program that delivered small but timely checks to eligible producer applicants to support investment in the 2026 crop.

Emergency relief helps, but it is not a long-term solution. The future of this industry depends on investment capital, practical regulation, efficient production systems, and continued growth in WILD consumer demand. The following pages outline how we are working to address each of those areas.



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Wild Blueberry
Commission of Maine
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Office: (207) 581-3496

VOLUNTEERS

In addition to the dozens of volunteers listed below, the Commission drew engagement and input from others via Grower Listening Sessions, the Wild Blueberry Tax Survey, a State Policy industry member listserv, and one on one conversations with many of you. The Commission deeply appreciates and values the dedicated industry members that contribute their time and resources to serve the industry. Thank you!

Commissioners	
Lisa Hanscom	Chair; active
Simeon Allen	Vice Chair; active
David Bell	past Chair; active
Nicolas Lindholm	past Vice Chair; active
Tiffany Linscott	past Vice Chair; past
Marie Emerson	active
Darin Hammond	active
Laura Flannery	active
Tiffany Linscott	active
Todd Merrill	active
Cary Nash	active

Advisory Committee	
Brogan Tooley	Chair; active
Courtney Hammond	Vice Chair; active
Bruce Hall	past Chair; past
Paul Sweetland	past Chair; active
Spencer Fiser	past Vice Chair; past
JD Newell	past Vice Chair; past
Piotr Kucharski	active
Billy Malay	active
Russell Schmeltzer	active
Tim Tabbutt	active

Fresh Pack and Added Value Committee	
Courtney Hammond	Chair; active
Ron Howard	Vice Chair; active
Marie Emerson	active
Ashley Field	active
Lisa Hanscom	active
Jacob Lennon	active
Shannon Lion	active
Michael Terrien	active
Lynn Thurston	past

Harvester Efficiency Project Steering Committee	
Lauren Bruns	active
Dell Emerson	active
Ashley Field	active
Bruce Hall	past
Courtney Hammond	active
Ron Howard	active
Billy Malay	active
JD Newell	active
Leon Perry	active
Alan Rau	active
Joe Romance	active
Brogan Tooley	active

Working Groups	
David Bell	Food Safety Working Group, active; School Nutrition Program Working Group, active
Marie Emerson	Food Safety Working Group, active
Shannon Fickett	Food Safety Working Group, active
Holli Francis	Food Safety Working Group, active; School Nutrition Program Working Group, active
Bruce Hall	MRL Working Group, past
Ed Hennessey	School Nutrition Program Working Group, past
Ron Howard	Food Safety Working Group, active
Tiffany Linscott	School Nutrition Program Working Group, past
Billy Malay	MRL Working Group, active
Brogan Tooley	MRL Working Group, active
Gabe Wilson	Food Safety Working Group, active

Interested in serving on the Commission or one of our Committees or Working Groups?

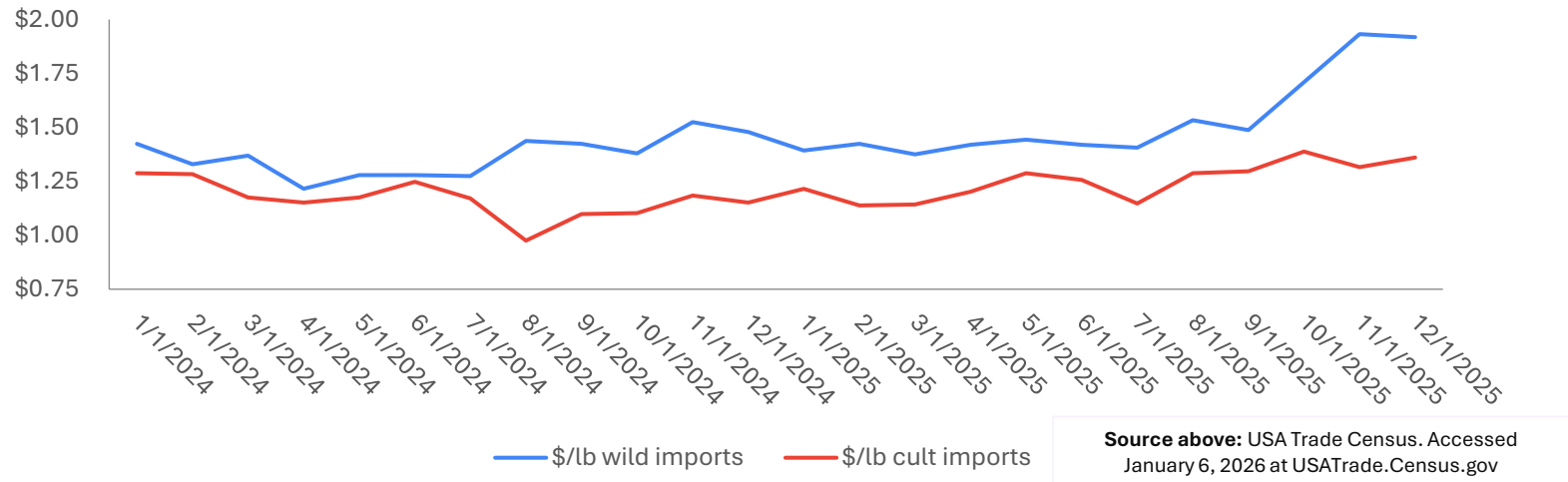
Contact us!

wbcm@maine.edu
(207)581-1475

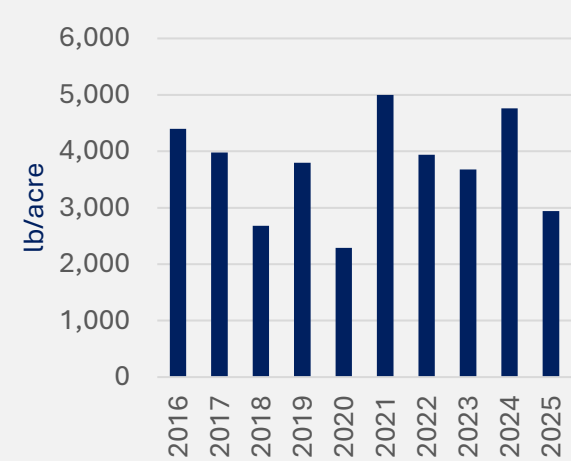
STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

The Maine wild blueberry industry lost an estimated 33% of its 2025 production, resulting in an estimated \$28M loss to the industry. Due to poor pollination and low yields, per acre production was down in 2025. That, plus the continuing increased costs from COVID-era inflation, recent tariffs, and other factors increased our per acre cost of production by about 50% from 2023 to 2025.

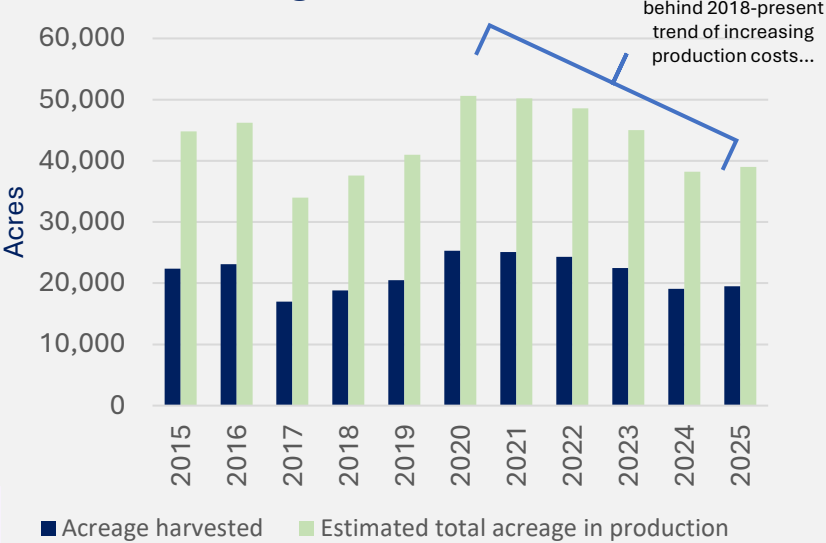
US Frozen BB (wild and cult.) Imports Price YoY (\$/lb)



Yield per Acre

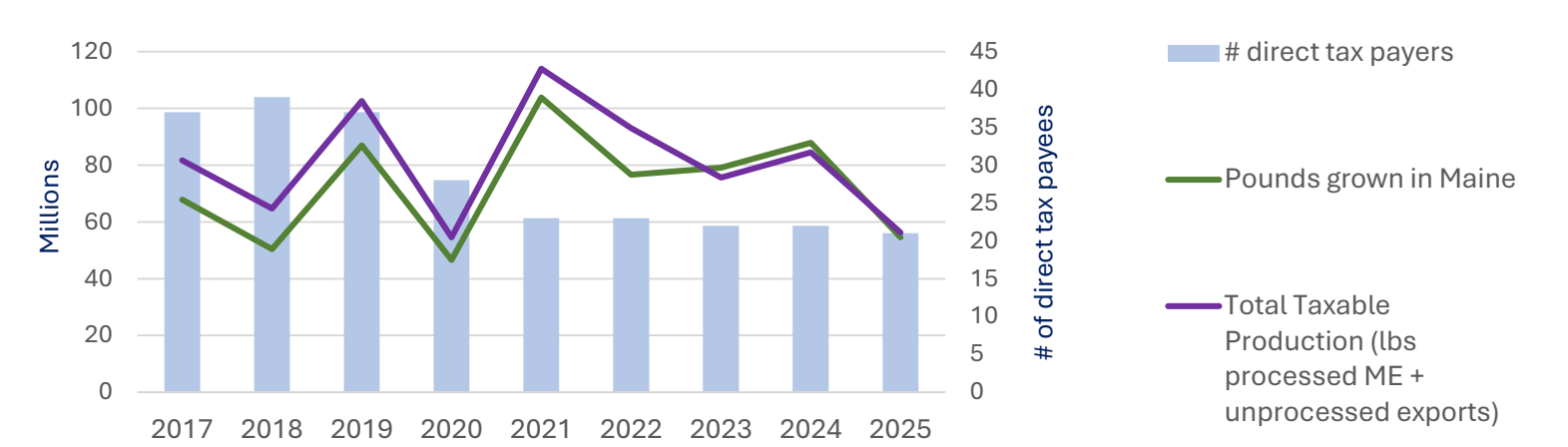


Acreage in Production



Sources (above and right): USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Annual Wild Blueberry Report / NE Fruit and Nut Report.

Maine Wild BB Tax and Production Trends 2017-2024

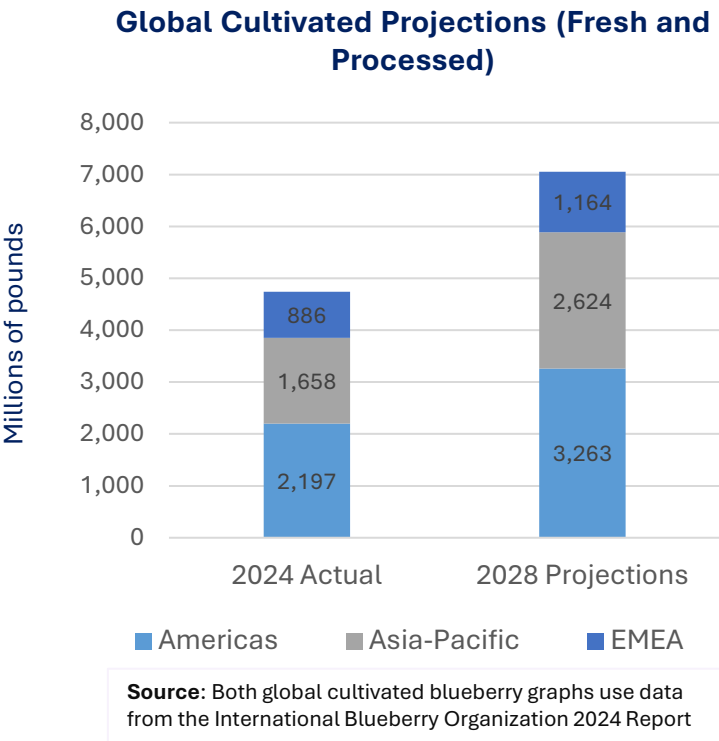
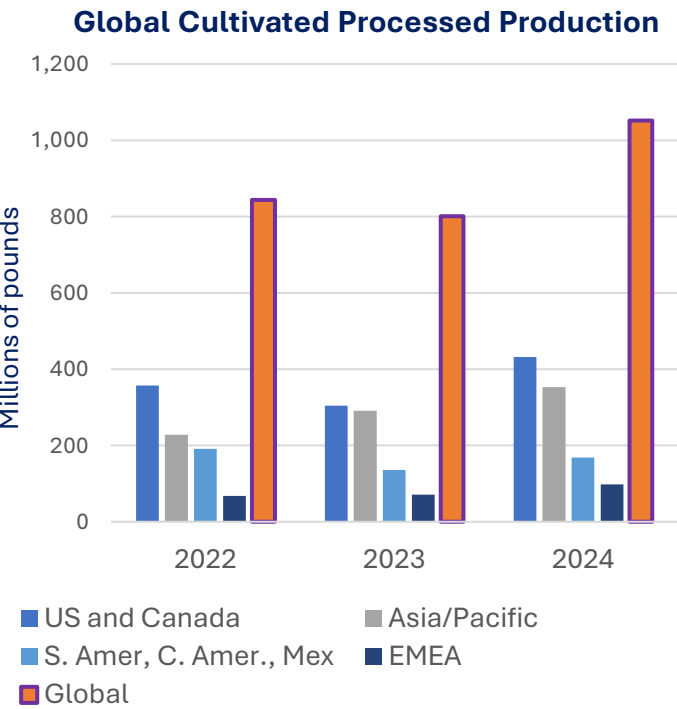


STATE OF THE INDUSTRY, cont'd

Competition pressures mount. Cultivated blueberries continue their upward trajectory with 5.1B pounds of combined (wild and cultivated) global production in 2024 and 7B pounds predicted by 2028. In the last 5 years, Maine has produced 28% of the wild blueberry crop, with Canada producing the remainder.

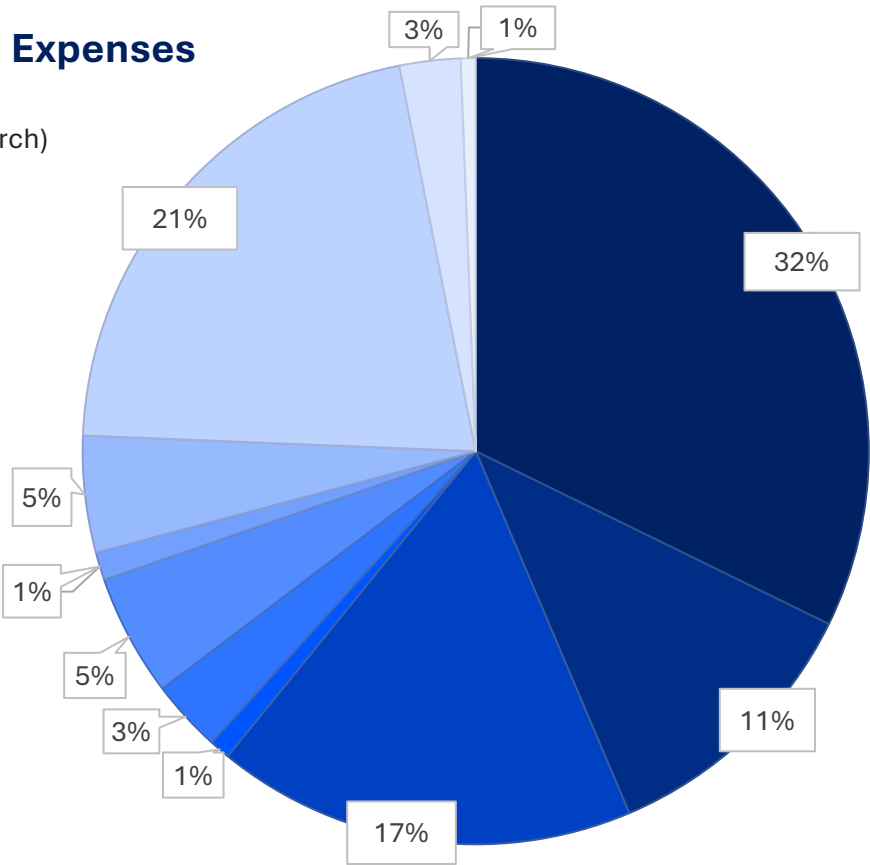
Wild Blueberry Production Maine and Canada, ME Tax, and Published [USDA] Price										
In Millions of Pounds										
	Quebec Wild	Maritimes Wild	Maine Wild	Canada Wild	Total Wild	Global Processed (wild and cult.)	% CAN	% ME	WB Tax \$	NASS \$/lb
2014	78.3	144.7	104.4	223.0	327.4		68.11%	31.89%	\$1,994,710	\$0.61
2015	50.0	170.8	101.1	220.8	321.9		68.59%	31.41%	\$1,857,724	\$0.47
2016	126.0	179.0	102.0	305.0	407.0		74.94%	25.06%	\$2,101,172	\$0.27
2017	80.0	126.4	67.8	206.4	274.2		75.27%	24.73%	\$1,228,749	\$0.26
2018	87.7	94.2	50.4	181.9	232.3		78.30%	21.70%	\$976,340	\$0.46
2019	80.0	126.0	87.0	206.0	293.0	1,105.9	70.31%	29.69%	\$1,539,689	\$0.49
2020	80.0	115.0	46.6	195.0	241.6	1,242.8	80.71%	19.29%	\$808,358	\$0.60
2021	36.0	125.0	103.8	161.0	264.8	1,543.2	60.79%	39.21%	\$1,703,870	\$0.77
2022	112.0	159.0	76.6	271.0	347.6	1,585.9	77.96%	22.04%	\$1,398,956	\$0.72
2023	105.0	119.0	79.1	224.0	303.1	1,489.5	73.91%	26.09%	\$1,141,961	\$0.52
2024	95.0	112.5	87.9	207.5	295.4	1,464.9	70.24%	29.76%	\$1,354,162	\$0.51
2025	92.0	65.0	54.6	157.0	211.6	-	74.20%	25.80%	\$783,260	\$0.67
5-year av volume Maine			80.4		5-year av % Maine		28.58%			
10-year av volume Maine			75.6		5-year av % CAN		71.42%			

Sources: Data from Wild Blueberry Association of North America – Canada, Dr. David Yarborough, Maine Revenue Services, International Blueberry Organization Reports, and USDA Nat. Ag. Statistics Service annual wild blueberry and fruit and nut reports.



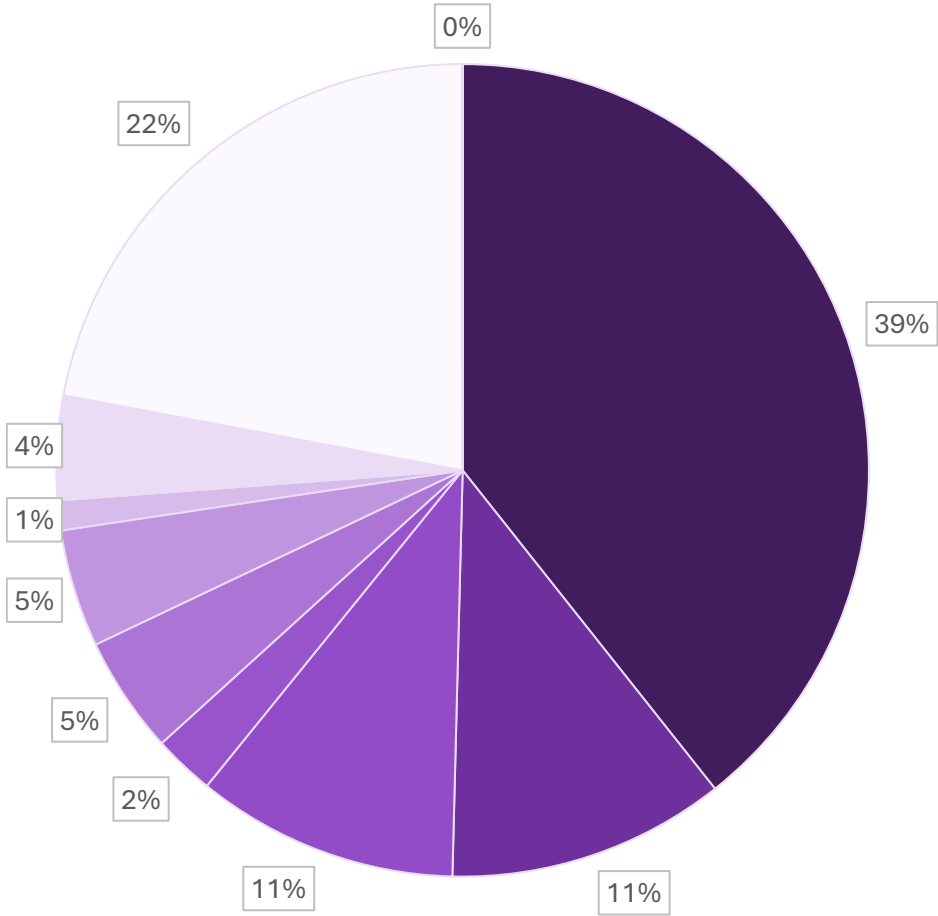
2024 Commission Expenses

- WBANA-US (Promotion and Health Research)
- Commission Promotion
- UMaine Research and Initiatives
- Events and Partnerships
- Policy Consultants
- Fresh Pack and Value Added
- Policy Memberships
- Operations
- Staff
- Issues and Opportunities
- AgInClassroom Curric.



2025 Commission Expenses

- WBANA-US (Promotion and Health Research)
- Commission Promotion
- UMaine Research and Initiatives
- Events and Partnerships
- Policy Consultants
- Fresh Pack and Value Added
- Policy Memberships
- Operations
- Staff
- Issues and Opportunities



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Commission sets work priorities based on grower listening sessions held every other year, current industry issues and opportunities, and actionable ideas with the potential to positively impact farm businesses. We assess and reset long term priorities every other year. Short term priorities are set annually each fall to drive the plan of work in the following year. For 2026 strategic priorities, visit wildblueberrycommissionofmaine.org.

2024 PRIORITIES

- Help address labor and workforce housing challenges.
- Facilitate the dissemination of food safety guidance and educate federal regulators about wild blueberry production practices.
- Create opportunities for producers to secure business capital through grants.
- Advocate for state and federal policies, opportunities, and regulations that support our industry.
- Help reduce economic pressure on growers by seeking a one-year hiatus from the grower portion of the wild blueberry tax.
- Support and foster research, innovation, economic tools, and opportunities that aid climate change adaptation, reduce supply inconsistencies, support cost-efficiencies, and address business and infrastructure challenges.
- Reassess investments in promotion, health research, and marketing to maximize cost-effectiveness, while continuing to differentiate wild from ordinary blueberries based upon wild blueberries superior taste, health benefits, and Maine provenance.
- Educate the industry about the types, use, and application of grower and processor contracts in US agriculture.

2025 PRIORITY

- Enhance wild blueberry grower and processor profitability

LONG TERM PRIORITIES

- Improve the level and consistency of profitability across scales of production.
- Increase the consistency of wild blueberry supply.
- Grow the number of Maine wild blueberry farms and businesses.
- Build capacity for wild blueberry research and Extension at the University of Maine.
- Support strategic wild blueberry promotion, health research, and market development to grow demand and loyalty.



2024 & 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Federal Policy

- **Awarded \$15.5 million for wild blueberry climate resilience**, 75% of which would go directly into the pockets of producers. **Note – Rescinded** June 2025 along with hundreds of other federally awarded climate change projects.
- Effectively engaged with EPA’s Mitigation Strategies and **succeeded in improving EPA policy** to account for the unique nature of wild blueberries.
- With Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance ([SCFBA](#)), facilitated adaptation and improvement of the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops ([MASC](#)) program nationally to ensure wild blueberry industry eligibility; **Program delivered \$2.2B to specialty crops nationally, \$18M in Maine, and \$800,000 to Hancock and Washington counties.**
- With [SCFBA](#), supported the inclusion of increased funding for key specialty crop programs in the “Big Beautiful Bill,” **securing a doubling of Specialty Crop Research Initiative funding (\$95M increase), and a 25% increase in Specialty Crop Block Grant funding (\$20M increase).**

Foster Research and Extension

- **Guided** development and field testing of a novel wild blueberry harvester design through the Harvester Efficiency Steering Committee
- **Spent** \$1 of wild blueberry tax funding for every \$20 in external grants supporting University of Maine wild blueberry research and Extension.
- **Coordinated** opportunities to educate wild blueberry producers about food safety, culminating publication of a revised UMaine Extension food safety bulletin to provide practical information on food safety Modernization Act Compliance

State Policy

- **Helped defeat 5 state labor bills** over 2 years that would have increased employer costs, liability, and regulatory bureaucracy.
- **Successfully defeated** the wild blueberry tax bill, in alignment with the vote of WBCM.
- **Successfully added** a provision to LD 1537 to protect producers who own freezers from a proposed mandate that would have resulted in expensive overhauls.
- **Led and participated** in various state policy coalitions to successfully correct inflated business energy costs, advocated for farm business capital (income-tax reducing) capital savings program, a new low-cost farmer health plan option, an agricultural bond issue to fund key state programs, and much more.

Wild Blueberry Weekend

- Generated **22 pieces of positive Wild Blueberry Weekend coverage** and almost \$6 in consumer spending for every \$1 spent in 2025
- **Doubled Wild Blueberry Weekend sales over five years** and maintained high participation rates

Other Accomplishments

- Supported selection and contracting top caliber agency to chart and execute a data-driven model of health research promotion, which delivered **33 wild blueberry health articles in less than 12 months**
- Made possible the sales of more **than 16 million pounds of wild blueberries to the USDA over 2 years with a value of more than \$25 million**, representing more than 10% of Maine’s entire wild blueberry crop. This includes a single 5M+ lb award in January of 2025, the result of a year of advocacy to improve the market condition.
- **Coordinated** with Canadian industry to help develop a successful joint US / CAN meeting in Quebec, broker agreements, and build momentum for mutually beneficial health research and promotion.

FOSTERING UNIVERSITY OF MAINE RESEARCH

THE WILD BLUEBERRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee (WBAC) is a dedicated group of 7 industry members who develop research priorities that guide University of Maine research extension to maximize benefit to wild blueberry producers. Annually, WBAC calls for research and extension proposals and seeks to award funding to those of the greatest value to producers.

With awards amounting to **\$361,299** in '24 and '25, University of Maine researchers were able to:

- **Improve** our understanding of plant pathogens like mummy berry and leaf spot and develop management recommendations (**\$60,092**)
- **Improve** understanding of the risks and benefits of whole field mulching (**\$24,379**)
- **Develop** technology to improve the shelf-life of fresh wild blueberries (**\$18,544**)
- **Develop** tools that could improve wild blueberry harvest efficiency (**\$20,000**)
- **Project** climate change impacts on mycorrhizal populations and pollination (**\$37,363**)
- **Identify** sources of pathogen contamination for postharvest risk management (**\$34,650**)
- **Initiate** studies to modernize wild blueberry nutrient management (**\$58,154**)
- **Reassess** wild blueberry pollinator abundance and update stocking recommendations (**\$28,695**)
- **Support** a climate change and wild blueberry project which had its federal grant support frozen early in 2025 (**\$50,860**). **Note** - this was restored and tax funding returned.
- **Trial** new weed management products (**\$28,562**)

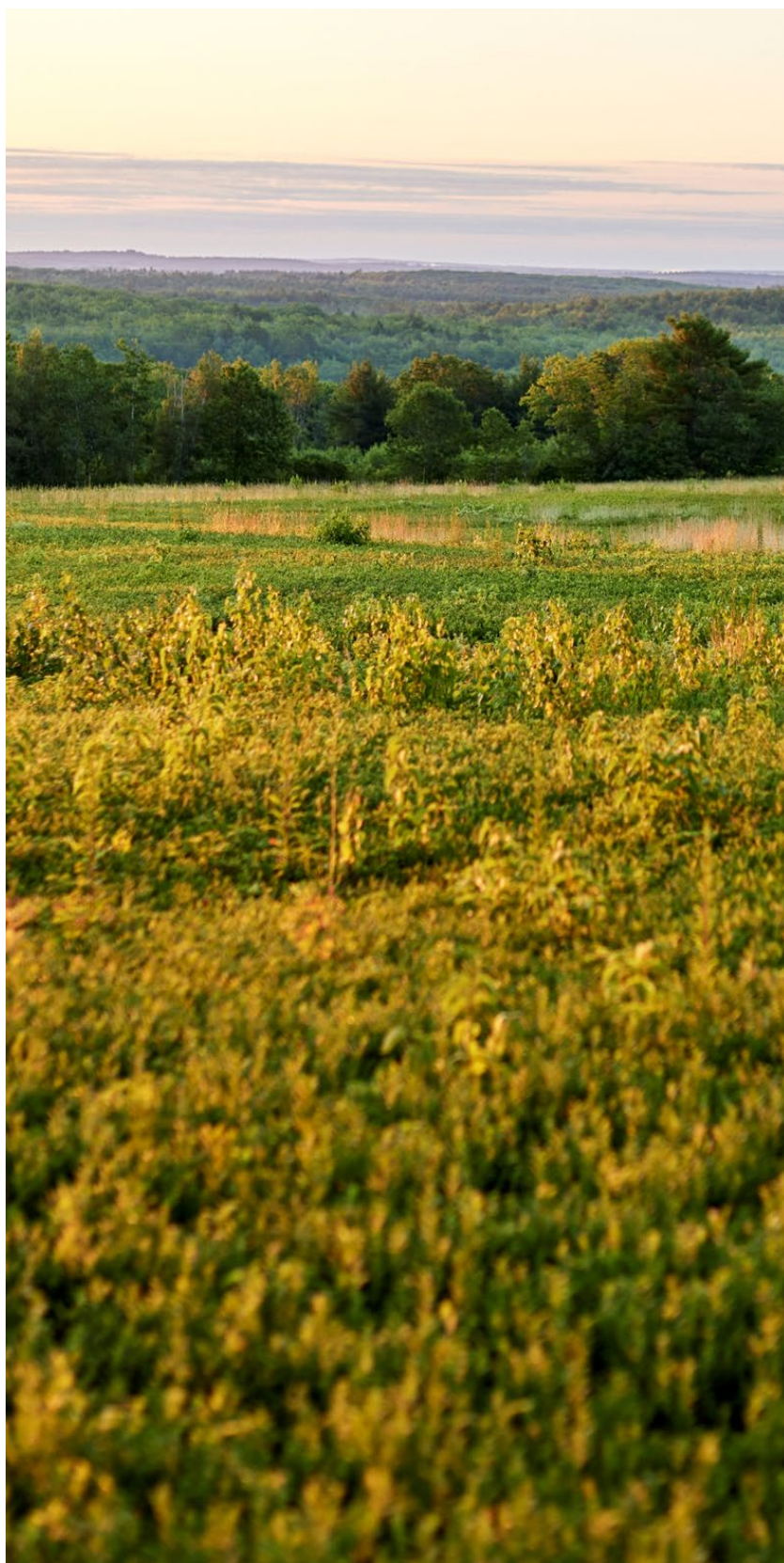


“The wild blueberry is a unique crop, and its complexity continues to challenge and inspire researchers. While progress is rarely linear, each project adds to our understanding and helps identify new opportunities for growers. The WBAC remains optimistic about the future and is committed to supporting research that strengthens the industry and helps it adapt to the challenges and opportunities ahead.”

**- Brogan Tooley, Wyman’s,
Chair of WBAC**

UMAINE RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The University of Maine (UMaine) wild blueberry research team spans Cooperative Extension and Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station (MAFES). Extension focuses on outreach and MAFES on research, although there is much crossover. The following represent select outcomes from the work of these individuals as they strive to generate results for the industry.



New Wild Blueberry Fact Sheets ('24 and '25)

- Weed Mapping Using Your Smart Phone
- Boom Sprayer Calibration
- Burning Wild Blueberry Land in Maine
- Considerations for Solar on Wild Blueberry Land
- Mulching Wild Blueberry Fields
- How to Test your Own Soil pH
- Deer Management in Wild Blueberry

Pending Fact Sheets

- Fertilizing with N and P
- Interpreting your Leaf and Soil Test Results
- How to Take Leaf and Soil Samples
- Managing False Valdensia
- Managing Mummy Berry Disease
- Managing Leaf Spot Disease
- Wild Blueberry Growth Stages
- Mulching Wild Blueberry Fields (major update)
- Weed Management for Wild Blueberry Fields
- Wild Blueberry Production Schedule and Management Recommendations
- Drone Spraying in Maine: Requirements and Considerations

Impact

- Dr. Calderwood's lab delivers outreach to an average of 386 people annually, largely in-person, including 42 one-on-one consultations with commercial producers
- 77% of '25 Feb. Wild BB Extension Conference attendees increased their knowledge of weed management
- Extension showed 32 farmers managing 12,500 acres how to calibrate sprayers in '24 and '25

UMAINE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Our University research partners, with the support of industry and external grant dollars, delivered the following recommendations from their most recent research projects. This is not comprehensive and is not intended to guide management. For full details and recommendations, visit the wild blueberries Extension website (extension.umaine.edu/blueberries). Note that recommendations don't necessarily reflect the opinion(s) of the Wild Blueberry Commission or the Advisory Committee.

Dr. Calderwood - Extension

- Soil moisture of 10% or lower impacts the crop for 4 years.
- Drone applications were not effective in early studies.
- Rely 280 can be applied in early spring as a pre-emergent to achieve 60% control of fine leaved sheep fescue and poverty oat grass.
- Late applications of flufosinate-ammonium can cause damage to wild blueberry plants.
- Mulching 1 to 1.5 inches can protect the crop from drought for about 2 weeks, but growers must talk to their buyers before deciding to mulch – as many will not purchase berries from mulched fields.
- Use Extension's phenology tracker to help manage your fields.
- Endurance and Nutrisync foliar calcium supplements can be used to reduce June drop (green to blue fruit drop).
- The distribution of rainfall during the season is more important than total rainfall for vegetative growth and development.
- The DH can harvest with lower loss rates and improved quality.
- Forced-air cooling in fresh pack postharvest and preprocessing reduces temperature and surface moisture to improve quality.
- Bring berry temp down to less than 44 F asap after harvest.

Dr. Fanning - Entomologist

- Parasitoid augmentation may aid SWD management, more work needed.
- Producers should protect wild areas near fields from drift to retain and protect important populations of certain beneficial SWD parasitoids.
- Evidence is still strong that understocking hives leads to poor pollination.
- Development of an improved red striped fire worm emergence model.
- Updated and targeted early harvest recommendations for SWD.
- Verdepryn is as effective as Delegate for SWD control.

Dr. Annis – Fungal Pathology

- Two new products are promising and recommended for mummy berry control.
- Monitoring mummy berry in your own field provides best timing for management.
- Manage leaf spot disease in the prune year.
- Management of leaf spot on prune fields is best before or during wild blueberry bloom.

Dr. Jin – Food Science

- A natural algae derived coating can increase fresh shelf life up to 1 week.



HARVESTER EFFICIENCY PROJECT BY TEAM WILD

In collaboration with University of Maine Extension, the Commission was awarded a \$500,000 grant (with additional \$500k of primarily in-kind match) to reduce harvest shrink through improved harvesting technology and use practices. Project execution is led by Dr. Calderwood at the University of Maine Extension. The end of 2025 marks the third year of this project.

“To me, one of the most exciting outcomes of the work of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine over the last few years has been the potential for the innovations developed in this project. Our early objectives were aspirational relative to limited funding, and we didn’t understand the true cost (in time and money) of developing new specialized technology for wild blueberries. However, in 2025 it became clear that one of the project’s directions, the improvement and commercialization of a novel harvesting head design, could deliver a substantial economic impact to the industry.

This new design, developed by Mr. Alan Rau, has the potential to increase the proportion of fruit harvested, and reduce the amount left in the field, by a double-digit percentage. It has already demonstrated in harvest testing that it may be able to deliver a higher quality fruit postharvest by reducing harvest-damaged berries. This new head is the subject of ongoing field testing and improvements in 2026, now supported by the Wild Blueberry Advisory Committee, and is central to a significant USDA grant proposal that the research team submitted in June 2026. I am hopeful that at some point in 2027 or 2028, this new head will start to appear in Maine’s wild blueberry fields - and deliver on the earliest aspirations of this project to improve wild blueberry harvest efficiency.”

Eric Venturini, Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and Wild Blueberry Harvest Efficiency Steering Committee lead.

PILOTING INNOVATION IN WILD BLUEBERRY: Reducing Harvest “Shrink”



ADVANCED
MANUFACTURING
CENTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE
Maine Agricultural and
Forest Experiment Station



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE
Cooperative Extension



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE
Foster Center for
Student Innovation



Team
WILD



WBANA HEALTH RESEARCH

WILD BLUEBERRY HEALTH RESEARCH COMMITTEE GAINING GROUND

Annually, the Commission invests in the work of the Wild Blueberry Association of North America-US (WBANA). WBANA-US's joint Health Research Committee (HRC) is comprised of industry members across Maine and Canada who guide industry efforts to study the positive power of the wild blueberry on human health. While WBANA-US's marketing committee has spent most of the past 2 years evaluating strategy and direction, in 2025, HRC expanded their scope and hired a global PR firm with health and nutrition expertise to help tell the incredible wild blueberry story to a wider audiences, leveraging decades of investment in clinical studies with positive outcomes.

WILD BLUEBERRIES ARE THE *Better* for You Blueberry

NOT EVERY BLUEBERRY IS A *Wild* BLUEBERRY.
Wild blueberries are smaller than regular cultivated blueberries, have a more intense blueberry flavor, have double the antioxidant capacity and are available year-round in the grocer's frozen fruit section.

THE TINY BERRY WITH THE BIGGER HEALTH BANG FOR YOUR *Buck*
Their compact size doesn't just mean more berries per cup—it means more nutrition per spoonful.

33% MORE ANTHOCYANINS
4x MORE ZINC
2x THE ANTIOXIDANTS
8x MORE MANGANESE
MORE INTENSE BLUEBERRY TASTE
72% MORE FIBER

Wild blueberries deliver:
More antioxidant power due to higher skin-to-pulp ratio
More fiber and other nutrients like zinc per bite

Between April '25 and March of '26, the HRCs new strategy:

- Delivered 33 articles covering the health benefits of wild blueberries.
- Created 599 million impressions.
- Catalyzed wild blueberry quotes in 14 articles (from WBANA Nutrition Specialist, Kitty Broihier)
- Resulted in 82% of coverage over-indexing with fresh and frozen blueberry consumers.

HRC is delivering tools to suppliers to educate buyers and arm suppliers with the most up-to-date wild blueberry health research outcomes and messaging:

- Wild blueberry health benefits poster that sellers can share with buyers for education and awareness.
- Wild blueberry health research toolkit for industry supplier reference.

HRC provides funding and wild blueberries to researchers aiming to improve our understanding of the benefits of wild blueberry consumption. In two years, this support has resulted in:

- 7 new scientific publications, 6 completed studies, 9 in-process publications, 7 in-process studies

Most significant wild blueberry health research findings from 2024 to 2025:

- Research demonstrated that wild blueberry metabolites can provide protective and restorative benefits to skin and can help protect skin from UV damage.¹
- Wild blueberry-derived metabolites can positively impact enzymes crucial for lipid metabolism and mitigating oxidative stress in fat tissue, enhancing our understanding of the role of that wild blueberries play in obesity prevention and weight management.²

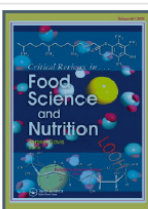
¹<https://pubs.rsc.org/en/content/articlelanding/2024/fo/d4fo01874e>

²<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mnfr.70101>

WBANA HEALTH RESEARCH



In 2024 the Health Research Committee (HRC) invited leading scientists to Bar Harbor to meet and share knowledge about the wild blueberry's impact on the body's metabolic systems and identify what is still needed in the growing body of evidence that supports the berry's wide-ranging health benefits.



Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition



ISSN: 1040-8398 (Print) 1549-7852 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/bfsn20

Wild blueberries and cardiometabolic health: a current review of the evidence

Sarah A. Johnson, Dorothy Klimis-Zacas, Arpita Basu, Bradley W. Bolling, Rafaela G. Feresin, Shirin Hooshmand, Peter J. Joris, Zhaoping Li, Mary Ann Lila, April J. Stull, Pon Velayutham Anandh Babu & Tiffany L. Weir

In 2024, HRC organized a wild blueberry research symposium to bring some of the best wild blueberry health researchers together under one roof. As a result of that event, a core team of researchers published a wild blueberry health review article (clipped above) in January of 2026 and continue to coordinate their investigations piling up evidence of wild blueberries' whole body health benefits.

Review article highlights:

- Scored in the **top 5% of all research papers**, indicating significant media coverage, including 81 traditional media placements, and 30 social media mentions.
- In under **4 months**, there were **701 million** impressions.



WILD BLUEBERRY WEEKEND

Wild Blueberry Weekend is carried out by the Commission’s FPVAC, a group of industry volunteers dedicated to highlighting and creating opportunities for the growth of our promising fresh pack sector. Wild Blueberry Weekend now has a 5-year track record of growth and success. This event that draws thousands of Mainers and tourists to visit wild blueberry farms, educates the public about the Maine wild blueberry story, and drives and inspires business opportunities at participating farms.

EARNED MEDIA COVERAGE

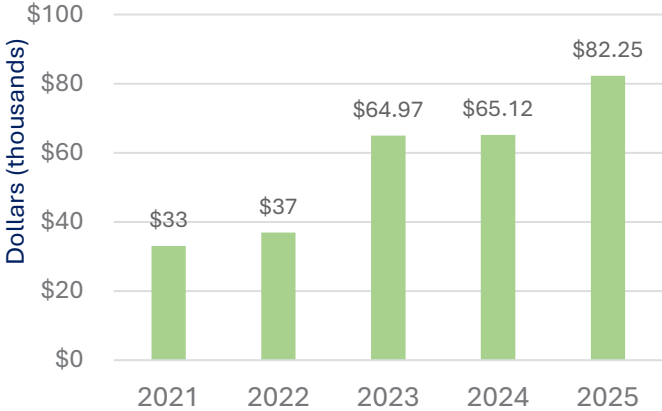
Through diligent outreach efforts and a pivot to an on-site Governor’s proclamation event, earned media significantly outpaced past years. Coverage was centered in a clear call to action–celebrate Maine’s most iconic crop at a Wild Blueberry Weekend event near you.

	Pieces of Coverage	Estimated Views	Audience	Online Readership
2025	22	138,829	35.4 M	35.1 M

ROI (\$:\$)

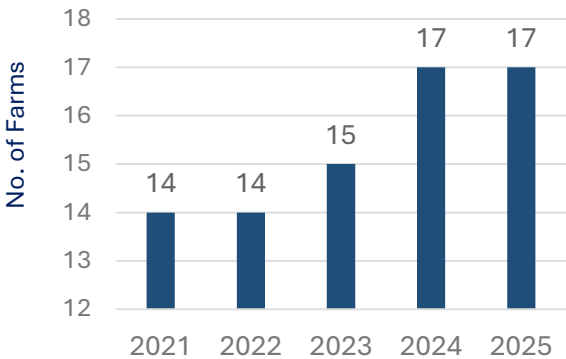


Total On-Farm Sales During Wild Blueberry Weekend ('21-'25)

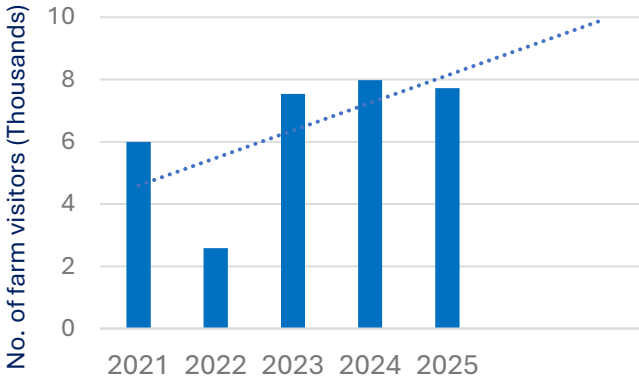


"Wild Blueberry Weekend has proven to be a tremendous success for Maine's wild blueberry industry. The growth we have seen over the past five years in both farm visitors and on-farm sales speaks for itself, and I hope to see that growth continue."- **Courtney Hammond, Lynch Hill Farm, Chair of FPAVC**

Wild Blueberry Weekend Participating Farms ('21-'25)



Wild Blueberry Weekend Total Farm Visitors*



*Farm visitor numbers based on post-event farm surveys. Number shown extrapolated proportionally based upon returned post-event surveys. 66% of participating growers returned surveys in 2023.

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. While our program dollars support the purchasing of fruit for schools (SNP), Commission staff also pursues larger commodity purchases for food banks when such purchases would improve the market condition, and advocates for the growth of the high value “household” program, which delivers 20 pound boxes of 1 lb bags of fruit to tribal reservations.



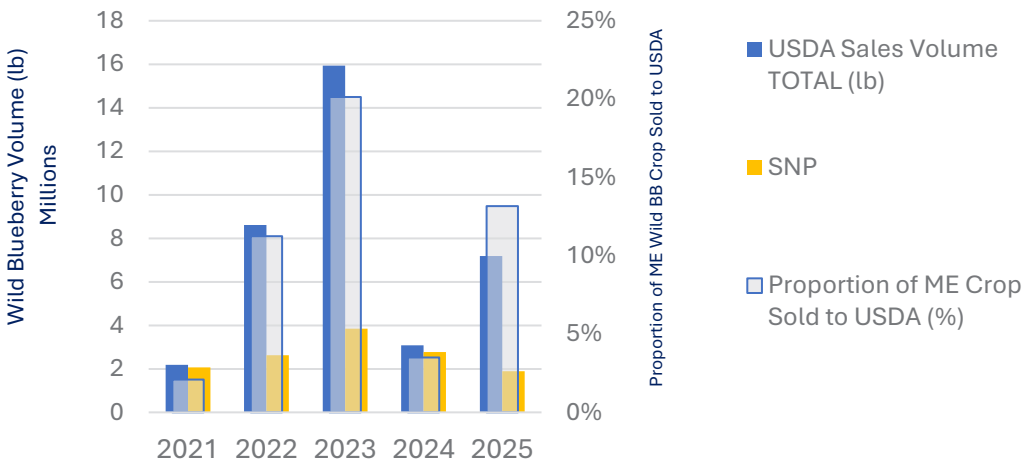
Heidi (program consultant), at the Annual National Conference of the School Nutrition Program in July of 2025.

Wild Blueberry Prices in USDA Sales ('22-'25 FY)



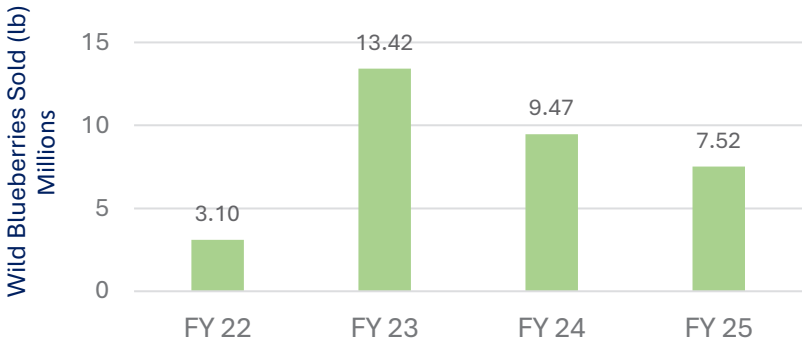
One of our ads, pictured here outside the conference building on July 14th, 2025 San Antonio, Texas.

USDA Sale Volume as Proportion of Maine Crop ('21 to '25 CY)



It's important to note that in some graphs and charts information as presented by the Calendar Year (CY), Jan to Dec, while in others it is presented as a USDA Fiscal Year (FY). The USDA tracks and reports information based on their FY (October 1 through September 30), while we budget for this program on a CY basis.

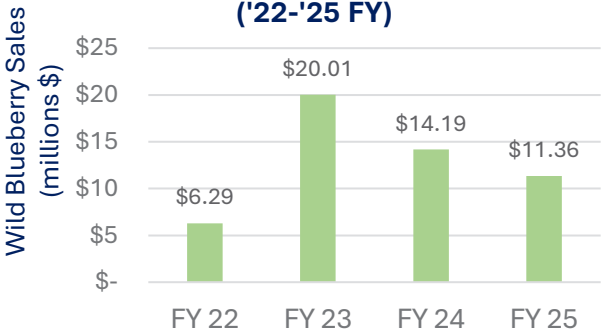
Wild Blueberries (lb) Sold to USDA ('22-'25 FY)



Program investments in the SNP grew in 2024 and 2025 and our program consultant Heidi worked to grow the core of the program. Following our crop failure in 2025, however, our ability to fulfill orders disappeared, bringing our 2025 program numbers down considerably. Notably, 2025 includes a large commodity order of more than 5 million pounds of fruit that was awarded well before our 2025 crop failure. The Commission has wisely reduced the program for 2026 due to our supply challenges and refocused on maintaining relationships with school purchasers until the Maine wild blueberry supply stabilizes.

History of Program Size	
CY	\$ Spent
2017	\$200,000
2018	\$164,000
2019	\$129,024
2020	\$122,356
2021	\$61,983
2022	\$83,567
2023	\$104,163
2024	\$151,524
2025	\$137,701

Wild Blueberry (\$) Sales to USDA ('22-'25 FY)



2024 STATE POLICY

We strive to represent the voices of Maine’s wild blueberry farms and businesses through our advocacy in Augusta. Successful policy outcomes require year-round engagement in Augusta. From January to June our Executive Director, Eric, is often in Augusta advocating for the wild blueberry industry on various topics. Eric also serves on and/or attends various board and committees active in state policy to better represent the voices of the Maine wild blueberry industry.

SUCSESSES

- Opposed burdensome agricultural labor bills and fought to prevent the piece rate floor from aligning with state minimum wage. – SUCCESS through Governor’s veto
- Fought and won to defeat [LD 1511](#), which we believe would have decreased the authority of the Board of Agriculture to provide oversight to University of Maine agricultural allocations.
- Successfully added a provision to [LD 1537](#) to protect producers who own freezers from state requirements that would have mandated unnecessary and expensive overhauls of coolant systems.
- Helped defeat 4 labor bills that would have increased employer costs, liability, and regulatory bureaucracy.
- Successfully opposed two bills that would have made harmful changes to tree growth and open space tax incentive programs.

FAILURES

- Introduced and advocated for a 1-year pause to the wild blueberry tax. The bill was killed not from any lack of support, but simply due to legislative dysfunction and political infighting that led most bills with costs attached to die at the session’s end.
- In coalition with other agricultural groups, supported grants for sustainable water source development ([LD 220](#)) and infrastructure ([LD 2212](#)). Neither the Governor nor the legislature displayed the political will necessary to fund these programs in 2024.

ISSUE HIGHLIGHT – Wild Blueberry Tax Bill

LD 1386 attempted to reduce the grower tax for 1-year. It was not supported by the Commission (vote of 3 to 6), therefore, we opposed it and defeated it. Unfortunately, as a direct result of the divergent messages our industry presented to the Committee on Taxation in regard to this bill ([LD 1386](#)), our industry lost political capital. It is imperative that we do not bring disagreements to legislature. Instead, we need to resolve challenges within the industry and the organizations that represent it. We should always strive to present proposed legislation to the legislature from a position of unity. If we cannot achieve unity, we should not bring it to the legislature, or we risk our own ability to advocate for the industry’s interests in the future.



Eric Venturini (Executive Director) and Representative Jack Ducharme pose for a photo at the beginning of the Agricultural Council of Maine’s (AgCOM) legislative tour in 2024, which Eric coordinated as the President of AgCOM. Samantha Warren (University of Maine) appears in the background.

2025 STATE POLICY



Eric Venturini (Executive Director) and Jenn Eisinger (summer intern) award Representative Lucian Daigle with a 3rd place, “Best Wild Blueberry Raker Ever” award, for raking 16.2 pounds in 5 minutes during a friendly competition at the 2025 wild blueberry legislature tour. Representative Tiffany Strout (not pictured) won 1st by raking a whopping 23.14 lb pounds in 5 minutes!

ISSUE HIGHLIGHT – Agricultural Minimum Wage

There have been many efforts over the years to subject agricultural workers to laws that govern other employees in Maine. Seasonal work is inherently different, and it does not always make sense to subject seasonal outdoor employment to the rules and regulations that govern office workers. The Executive Director was an active member of the Governor’s Committee on Agricultural Minimum Wage and advocated for a middle of the road approach that would pass a minimum wage, but exempt piece rate, and otherwise not subject agricultural workers to other state rules and regs that are not a fit. Ultimately, agricultural groups were able to narrow proponents’ efforts to only include the change to minimum wage when a bill finally passed in 2025, but we could not secure an exemption to the agricultural minimum wage for piece rate work despite the strong support that we displayed for this exemption throughout the build up to this bill’s passage in 2025. The new agricultural minimum wage came into effect in January of 2026.

SUCCESSES

- In alignment with a 6 to 3 vote of the Commission, we fought and defeated a bill ([LD 1386](#)) that would have imposed a 1-year hiatus on the wild blueberry tax.
- Successfully advocated, along with a broad array of partner organizations, to reduce dramatic inequalities in the imposition of energy costs ([LD 1792](#)), which was set to impact some producers with 8-fold increases in energy costs.
- Helped defeat proposed weight limits on Route 46 that could have impacted wild blueberry transportation ([LD 232](#)).
- Helped to defeat an effort that would have set different minimum wages in different parts of the State, setting wild blueberry employers closer to urban areas at a severe disadvantage ([LD 853](#)).

CARRIED OVER

- We supported an effort to create a pilot capital savings program that would allow heritage sectors to set aside profits in a tax-free account ([LD 195](#)). Carried over in 2025, this bill died in 2026.
- We opposed efforts to convene a group whose charge was to study, and ultimately challenge, current laws governing landowner’s access to their groundwater ([LD 1696](#)). Carried over in 2025, this bill died in 2026.
- We supported the Maine Farm Bureau as it sought to provide its membership with a lower cost option for health coverage ([LD 893](#)). Carried over in 2025, this died in 2026.
- We continued to support efforts to capitalize key state agricultural programs (e.g., farmer grants). A bond package ([LD 1140](#)) was carried over in 2025. It and similar efforts all died in 2026.

FAILURES

- Despite our opposition, and efforts to exempt piece rate from the imposition of a state agricultural minimum wage on farm workers, [LD 589](#) passed and is now law.

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

FEDERAL POLICY

We communicate industry needs and priorities to members of Congress, and advocate for industry priorities through our participation in the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance. The short highlights below are only a small proportion of our ongoing and regular engagement in Federal policy to advocate for better opportunities for Maine wild blueberry growers.

Highlights

- **2025** - As President of Agricultural Council of Maine, Eric led the council to advocate directly to our Congressional delegation to fight against the loss of USDA funding for University of Maine agricultural programs, which was ultimately released.
- **2025** - With SCFBA, supported inclusion of increased funding for key specialty crop programs in the “Big Beautiful Bill,” securing a doubling of Specialty Crop Research Initiative funding (\$95M increase), and a 25% increase in Specialty Crop Block Grant funding (\$20M increase).
- **2024** - Educated the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about the unique wild blueberry agroecosystem as it applies to their new approach to crop protectant regulation, the “mitigation strategies.” Met with top EPA officials numerous times, submitted formal public comments, coordinated a wild blueberry tour for key EPA staff, all culminating in edits to EPAs proposed strategies that made them tenable and less impactful for Maine’s wild blueberry sector.
- **2024** - Coordinated opportunities to educate wild blueberry producers about food safety guidance, resulting in the publication of a newly revised UMaine Extension food safety bulletin ([Bulletin #4282](#)) to provide practical information on how wild blueberry producers can easily comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act.
- **2024 and 2025** - With the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance ([SCFBA](#)), built and advocated successfully to create the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops ([MASC](#)) program, then corrected national program guidelines to ensure wild blueberry industry eligibility; Program delivered \$2.2B to specialty crops nationally, \$18M in Maine, and \$800,000 to Hancock and Washington Counties.



2024 – Eric Venturini (Executive Director) educates Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials in the barrens about the unique nature of Maine’s wild blueberry agroecosystem during a fall tour.

OTHER POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Policy work starts by building coalitions, and it follows that much of our work starts there. The Executive Director and other industry representatives engage on several state and national organizations, boards, and committee to drive results for you.

THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

This Board advises the University of Maine System Chancellor and President on matters concerning agricultural research and Extension programs at the University of Maine. The Executive Director has served on various leadership roles on this board since 2023 and is currently (2026) serving as Vice Chair as the board works to bring greater security to the funding of University agricultural programs.

BRYANT CHRISTIE, INC

The Commission maintains a group membership in Bryant Christie, in order to effectively advocate for standardization of Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) across the globe, which makes entering offshore markets easier.

THE SPECIALTY CROP FARM BILL ALLIANCE.

The Executive Director serves on the Steering Committee and the Legislative Committee of the Alliance and has taken a leading role in the development of the alliance's priorities in the Farm Bill Conservation Title (e.g., NRCS program) space.

THE AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL OF MAINE

The Executive Director served as President of AgCOM in 2024 and 2025, leading efforts to increase the group's engagement with the congressional delegation and built the broadest coalition of agricultural organizations we believe, ever, to advocate for the inclusion of core ag priorities in the Governor's budget, then legislative efforts to attempt to fund those programs through a bond.

THE MINOR CROP FARMER'S ALLIANCE

The Executive Director serves on the Executive Committee and the Technical Committee of this to advocate for effective, credible, rationally-based federal pesticide regulation.

USDA – NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Executive Director serves on this committee to ensure that Maine NRCS practices and payments reflect the needs of wild blueberry producers.



Sec. IV: Policy

Group photo taken during the Agricultural Council of Maine (AgCOM) Legislative Tour in 2024, at a tour stop at Brodis Blueberries in Hope. Our Executive Director served as President of this group from 2024 to 2025.

COMMISSION STAFF

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine supports three full-time staff to carry out Commission priorities and work. The Wild Blueberry Association of North America, through a Memo of Agreement, also utilizes Commission staff to administer its accounts. To help execute this workload, the Commission seasonally hires undergraduate student employees, Graduate Students, and interns. For an updated listing of staff, interns, and student employees, visit wildblueberrycommissionofmaine.org



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Jenn Eisinger

Student Intern (2025)



**Jennifer McGinley
Maskala**

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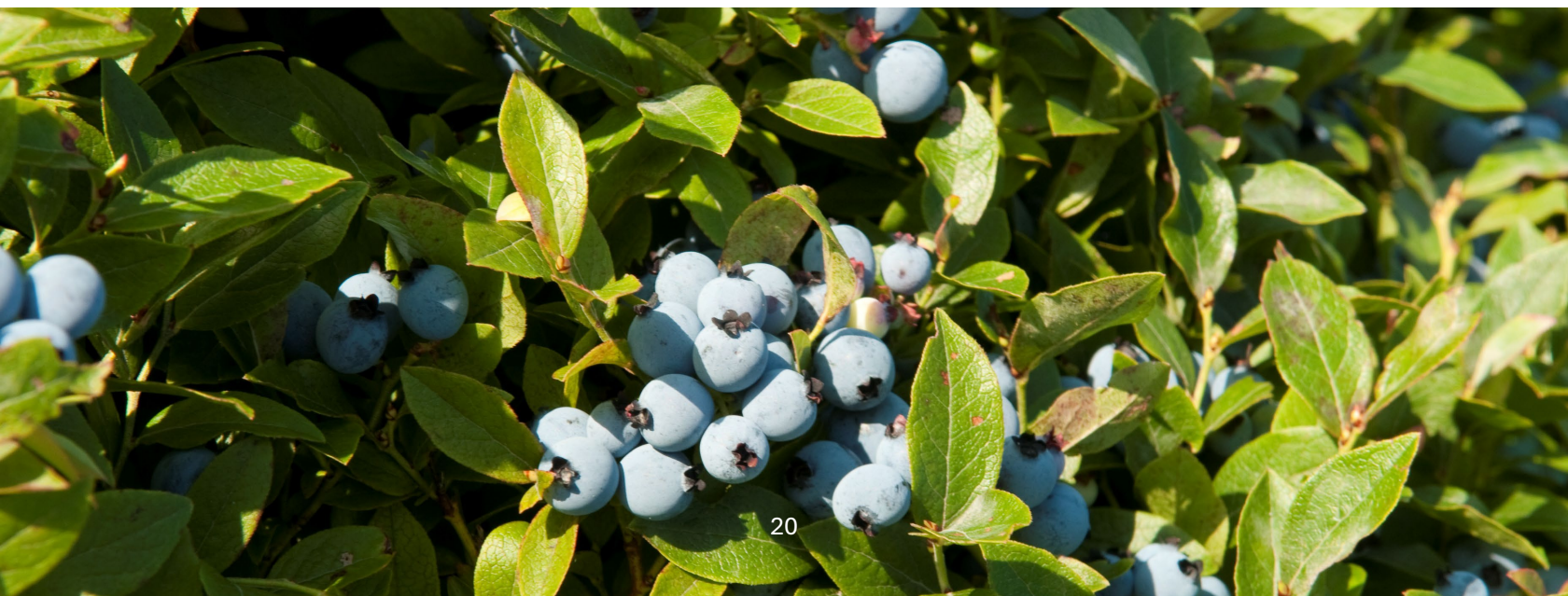
Julian Blohm

Student Intern (2024)



Shivani Patel

Administrative Specialist
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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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Commission staff acknowledges the generous contributions of industry volunteers serving on numerous boards, committees, and working groups both of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, and the Wild Blueberry Association of North America – US. We also thank University of Maine faculty and staff that helped to review the Fostering Research and Extension section.

All of these individuals and volunteers are crucial to the success of our mission. A special thanks to those who have helped to review and fact check various sections of this report.

Many photos that appear here are the property of the Wild Blueberry Association of North America – US. We thank WBANA-US for allowing us to use them.



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