



The blueberry jumps out to early lead over tomato

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TRENTON — Some may throw tomatoes at this bill. A measure designating the high-bush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) the state fruit passed the state Assembly yesterday.

It now has the advantage over a competing measure bestowing the same honor on the tomato. The tomato bill hasn't even had its first legislative hearing. And yes, the tomato is a fruit, not a vegetable.

"Blueberries, a delicious, nutritious and healthful fruit," reads part of a legislative note on the bill.

Nearly the entire Assembly agreed, voting 79-0 to send the measure to the Senate for consideration.

Even Assemblyman Francis Bodine, R-8th of Moorestown, who counts among his political friends a

state Assembly passed a bill yesterday nominating the blueberry, first voted in Burlington County, the state fruit.

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Blueberry gets lead on tomato

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number of cranberry growers, voted for the bill.

"I love blueberry pie," he said, although he said he could regret airing his preference. I might hear about this," he said.

Anyway, there isn't even a bill filed calling for an official state cranberry. The blueberry's only competitor is the tomato.

Burlington County, specifically Whitesbog in Pemberton Township, is the birthplace of the cultivated blueberry, but it took a group of schoolchildren from Monmouth County to lobby for the blueberry. Lawmakers from Monmouth are sponsoring the bill.

Outside the Legislature, however, it's hard to find backers.

Gov. James E. McGreevey, the state Department of Agriculture and the New Jersey Farm Bureau, a lobbying group for the agriculture industry, all took a pass at naming a preferred fruit.

"What we say is that all fruit should be given that kind of status," said farm bureau Director Peter Furey.

"We have not taken a position. It's like having a parent choose a favorite child," said state agriculture department spokeswoman Hope Gruzlovic.

If the Senate goes along, the blueberry would enter the hallowed halls of official state things. They include the violet as state flower, the eastern goldfinch as state bird, the honeybee as state bug, the horse as state animal, the square dance as state dance, and the knobbed whelk conch as the state shell.