

Blueberry Growing Proves a Paying Industry for South Jersey

Cultivated Berry Brings Good Price

Charles S. Beckwith, Specialist in Cranberry Growing

The propagation of selected wild blueberry plants by a commercial nursery, together with the development of improved hybrid varieties by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, has been widely commented on by the agricultural press. The accomplishment coming at the end of 15 years' work deserves all the publicity it receives.

The Wild Blueberry vs. the Cultivated Blueberry

A box of wild blueberries consists of a mixture of all kinds and sizes of blueberries that the picker happened to find in a day's hunt in the woods. There is rarely any uniformity in the degree of ripeness of the fruit or in the packing thereof. As a result, a considerable part of the berries reach the consumer over-ripe, undersized or otherwise unfit for use. Even with additional cleaning, it is difficult to sweeten them satisfactorily, due to

the lack of uniformity in the natural sweetness of the berry itself. In spite of the defects, the blueberry is the most popular wild berry in the market today.

The improved and cultivated blueberry is of unusually high quality and large size, as the plant has been selected as being the best among many hundred thousand wild plants, or else it is a selected hybrid resulting from a cross between two extra-good wild plants. The propagation of all plants of a variety from a single individual insures a uniformity in taste, color and, in some degree, size. By taking only ripe berries at each picking, the grower is able to have an even degree of ripeness in each package.

The improved blueberry will replace the wild blueberry in the market as fast as it can be produced and at a price at least 50 per cent higher. That is to say, if a retail store had a crate of cultivated blueberries at 45 cents per quart side by side with a crate of wild blueberries at 30 cents per quart, the former would sell faster, and as a result the store would not keep wild blueberries if it could obtain the others.

An additional benefit received from the uniformity in ripeness of the product is in its ability to withstand shipment without damage. Actual experience has shown that these blueberries will keep a week or more in fair storage without perceptible deteriora-

tion. This would indicate that the berries could be shipped in refrigerator cars as far as the Mississippi River.

Plenty of Land for Blueberry Culture

Land suitable for blueberry culture is ex-

tremely plentiful in New Jersey. The blueberry prefers a moist area with a peat covering and a sand subsoil to such a depth that deep plowing will turn up some of the sand. The virgin growth on land that has been planted to blueberries includes Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), Leather Leaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*) and pine with a ground covering of Sheep Laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*). The writer estimates that there are at the minimum 100,000 acres of such land in southern New Jersey. There are doubtless other types of soil on which blueberries may be grown, but this will have to be determined by trial.

Cost and Profits Prove Interesting

The land is relatively cheap, but as a rule it has to be bought in large quantities so that the average cost for each acre used might be as high as

\$40. The cost of cleaning and fitting the land is somewhat higher, but the high cost of the plants, due to their scarcity, has been the chief charge against the industry. A reasonable cost for establishing an acre of blueberries is as follows:

Cost of land	\$ 40
Cleaning and preparing land	200
Plants (1360) at present price	1,000
Cost of setting plants	10
	<hr/>
	\$1,250

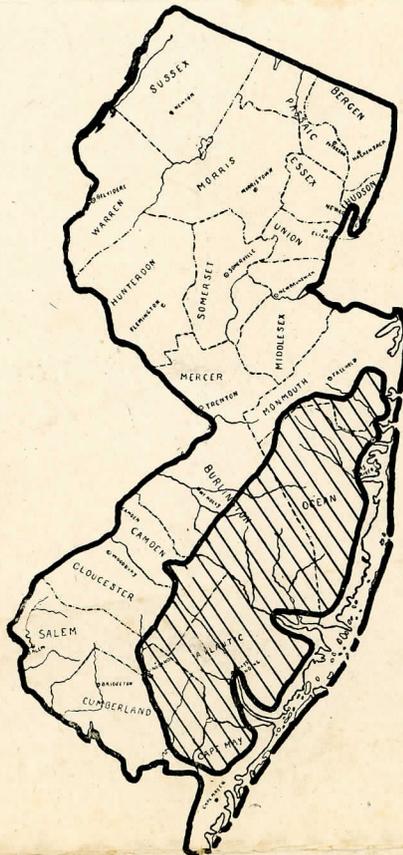
The average price for cultivated blueberries at the shipping station has been about \$10 a crate. Of this, between \$2.50 and \$3 goes for harvesting expenses, including picking, packing, package, and trucking (7 miles). This leaves \$7 for general expenses and profit. The acre cost of one year's cultivating is \$25, pruning after the fifth year \$15, fertilizer and incidental expenses \$10.

Experience on 20 acres of partly grown plants indicates that the crops of the third, fourth and fifth seasons will pay the carrying charges on the property for the 5 years and possibly leave some profit. An actual yield of 60 crates per acre on a 2½ acre plantation 3 years old has been secured. The sixth year and thereafter, as the plantation is in full bearing, the yield should approximate 160 crates to the acre annually. The re-



WHOLE FAMILIES TURN IN TO HARVEST A BLUEBERRY CROP

The Shaded Portion of this Map of New Jersey Shows the Pine-Barren Region Known to Contain Much Blueberry Land



turn per acre at that time should not be less than \$650 after deducting \$300 for harvesting and \$50 for general expenses. It would appear, therefore, that blueberry culture

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To Prophecy

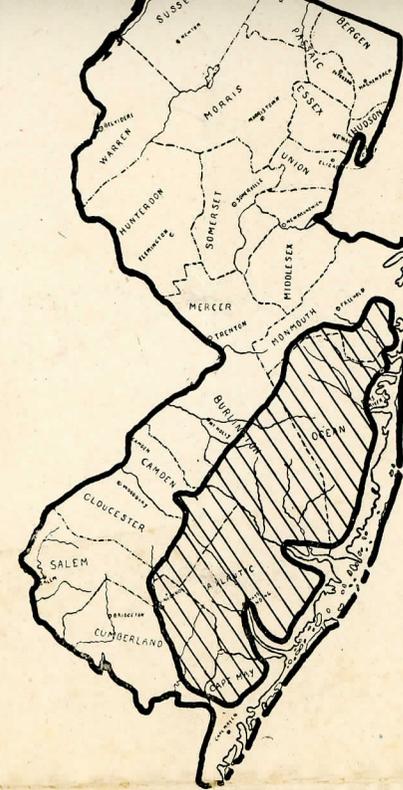
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turn per acre at that time should not be less than \$650 after deducting \$300 for harvesting and \$50 for general expenses. It would appear, therefore, that blueberry culture might be a very profitable branch of agriculture.

However, these figures were taken on a property where blueberry culture was a side line, with cranberries the main crop. Thus no charge was made for housing the laborers, for idle time of horses or trucks, etc.

Only actual money spent in the blueberry work was recognized. In addition, account should be taken of the loss due to frost. The plants have been selected for frost resistance, but in spite of this there will be some damage from this source. Up to the present time, there has been no serious insect or disease trouble, but at a later date probably new insects and diseases will become established. They will have to be controlled at some expense to the grower.

To Prophesy

The cultivated blueberry will replace the wild blueberry in the markets of the country because of its superior size, flavor and ability to stand shipping. The initial cost is great, but the profits to be derived appear to be correspondingly high. There is the unknown factor of insect and fungous pests that will have to be controlled as they appear.