

# Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine



Activities, Issues, and News—Spring 2013



## Special points of interest:

- \* Check out the better blueberry at [www.wildblueberries.com](http://www.wildblueberries.com) and Go Wild!

## Natural Resource Groups Rally to Retain & Strengthen the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Recently, a number of natural resource and recreation groups have mobilized to support the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry that was created in 2012. The 125th Legislature merged the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources with the Department of Conservation and Forestry in 2012. However, the so-called “merger bill” only authorized assembling all the existing units into one department and resulting staff changes in the Commissioner’s office. During the Maine Legislature’s final passage of the merger bill a “sunset” clause was added for the new department whereby the merger would be undone if the 126th Legislature did not pass a bill making necessary changes within the department.

The idea to merge these two departments and potentially other related departments has been discussed over the last 20 years. As the budgets for social services have increased in recent decades, proportionally natural resource departments have not been well supported by the Legislature. Most natural resource groups support the idea of a merger that, in concept, synergizes departments to better utilize existing resources. However, these same groups harbored concerns in 2012 that details of how the departments were

to be merged were not clearly defined.

The current administration submitted L.D. 837 “An Act Clarifying the Laws Establishing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry” that addresses the “sunset” clause and makes some other minor changes to the department’s laws, however, it did not make structural changes to the merged department. Supporters of the merger concept had concerns that the organizational structure did not support the mission of the newly merged department or incorporate an effective management perspective. In discussions with Legislative members of the Joint Select Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry it was clear that though legislators had similar concerns, they did not have a plan to address the issues.

During late winter and spring of 2013, the “Natural Resource Network” comprised of Maine Farm Bureau, Small Woodland Association of Maine, Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine, Maine Potato Board, Maine Snowmobile Association, Maine Professional Guides Association, Maine Aquaculture Association, Maine Forest Products Council, and the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine worked to develop a structure to support the mission of the newly formed Department of Agriculture,

Conservation, and Forestry. Though the Maine Dairy Industry Association is also part of the Natural Resource Network it has chosen not to support the merger. The proposed structure developed by the Network was presented to the Legislature’s Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee during the hearing on LD 837 with the goal that the Committee would take the concepts and work them into a Committee amendment to LD 837 that the majority of the Committee could support.

The structure proposed by the natural resource groups and refined by the ACF Committee contains four bureaus; Agriculture, Forestry, Natural Resource Information and Planning, and Parks and Public Lands and does the following; maintains identity for agriculture, forestry and parks and public lands as well as the technical expertise to manage and protect unique land-based natural features of Maine; and provides all natural intersections for the department’s constituent groups. This structure will also provide a strong management team of bureau directors which can quickly mobilize resources within their bureaus to address natural resource challenges as directed by the Commissioner. After more than a half dozen “Legislative work sessions”

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the ACF Committee produced a majority report supporting the organizational concepts initiated by the network.

One example of how the new department will better support Maine's land based natural resources is addressing invasive species. In recent years 5 new invasive insects have come to Maine and there are others attacking forests in southern New England. Many of these pests affect agriculture, forestry and public lands. With this new structure the resources to address invasive species are in one

department. If the amended version of LD 837 is passed, the management structure to effectively use the resources of the department will be created.

Currently LD 837 is being debated in the Legislature. On Friday, June 7, the House passed the amended L.D. 837 overwhelmingly and it will be sent to the Senate for the final vote. The Natural Resource Council of Maine and Maine Audubon are working hard in opposition to this bill. Both groups chose not to constructively engage with the ACF Committee by offering

amendments that improved the new department. While concerns remain with members of the natural resource network regarding the implementation of the merger, particularly considering that the Legislature has not supported natural resource departments well in recent decades, the best option is to retain the newly merged Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry and effectively align and leverage existing resources against challenges and to reinforce opportunities. No other group put forth a better option. 🌱

## **Wild Blueberry Commission works with UMaine Cooperative Extension to host Trade Show**

Because the Maine Wild Blueberry business has grown tremendously in the last decade, the Blueberry Hill Farm Field Day (presented this year on Wednesday, July 17th) organized by UMaine Cooperative Extension has also grown. The Farm and professional and student research crew take time out to prepare a barbeque luncheon for wild blueberry growers and other guests during the annual Field Day. The barbeque and networking opportunity are components of a Field Day that is organized to present UMaine educational sessions including crop discussions, research talks and in field demonstrations.

Last year was the first year that we incorporated the **Wild Blueberry Farm Trade Show** into the summer Field Day meeting at Blueberry Hill Farm. The Farm Trade Show is organized to offer a place where businesses that sell

products to wild blueberry growers can bring their products and knowledge to interested farmers and network during the free luncheon provided to more than 200 people during the Field Day.

It is exciting times for growers who have seen the Wild Blueberry become known as an antioxidant Superfruit! over the last 15 years. The right investments in the crop have produced valuable and sustainable gains for Maine growers. Integrated Pest Management and UMaine Wild Blueberry research have helped growers to increase the 5 year average of wild blueberry production by 25% similarly the 5 year value of wild blueberry production has increased by 23%.

Equipment, Product, and Service companies are invited to exhibit at this new event for the Maine Wild Blueberry business. The Wild Blueberry

Farm Trade Show will take place from 9am to 4pm during the annual University of Maine Cooperative Extension **Wild Blueberry Field Day on July 17, 2013** at Blueberry Hill Farm in Jonesboro, Maine. Sponsorships will also be available to exhibitors and those who want to support the Wild Blueberry Field Day event.

We expect attendance of over 200 farmers and guests at this annual event and new trade show. There will be a limited number of outdoor spaces available at the show and vendors must pre-register to get a booth. Each registration will include a vendor company listing in the program, and lunch is free for all who attend. Please call Nancy England at 581-1475 or email [England@maine.edu](mailto:England@maine.edu) if you plan to attend the Field Day and Trade Show or if you would like to register as a vendor. 🌱